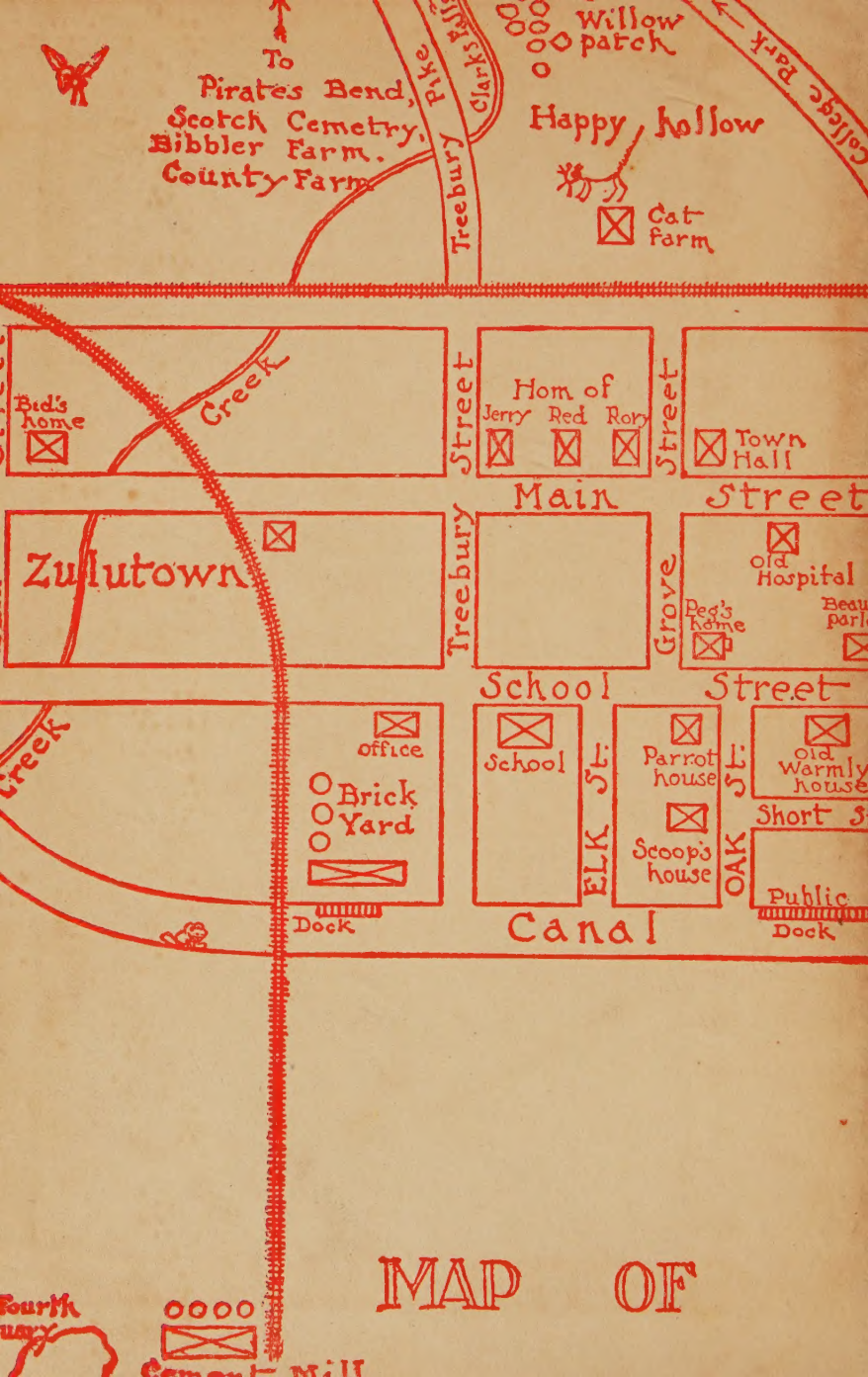
JERRY TODD EDITOR-IN-GRIEF

BY LEO EDWARDS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Scotch Cemetry,
Bibbler Farm.
County Farm
Pike
Treebury
Clarks Falls
Willow patch
Happy hollow
Cat farm
College Park
Bid's home
Creek
Street
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Jerry Red Ron
Street
Town Hall
Main
Street
Zululutown
Treebury
Grove
Old Hospital
Peg's home
Beau parl
School
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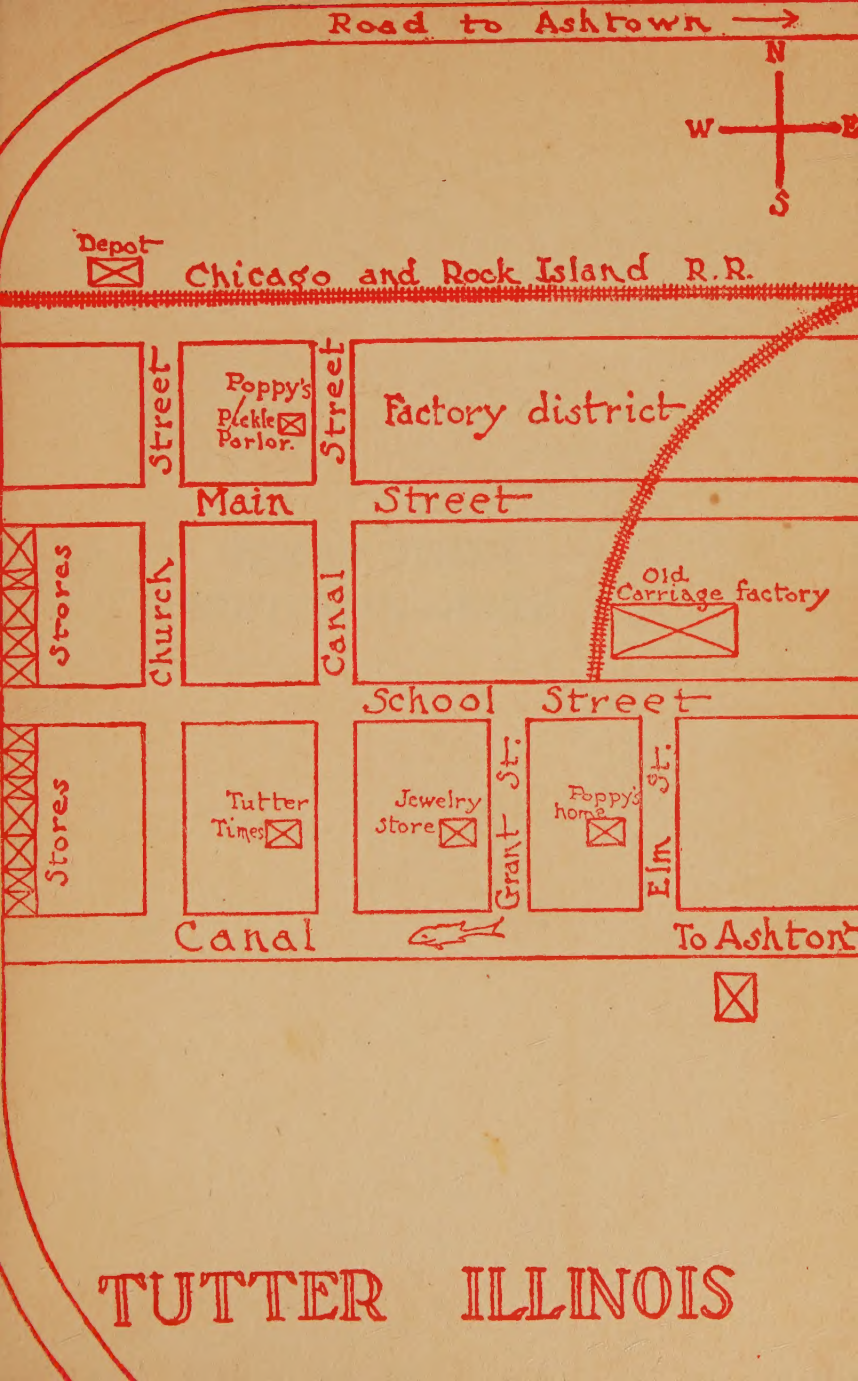
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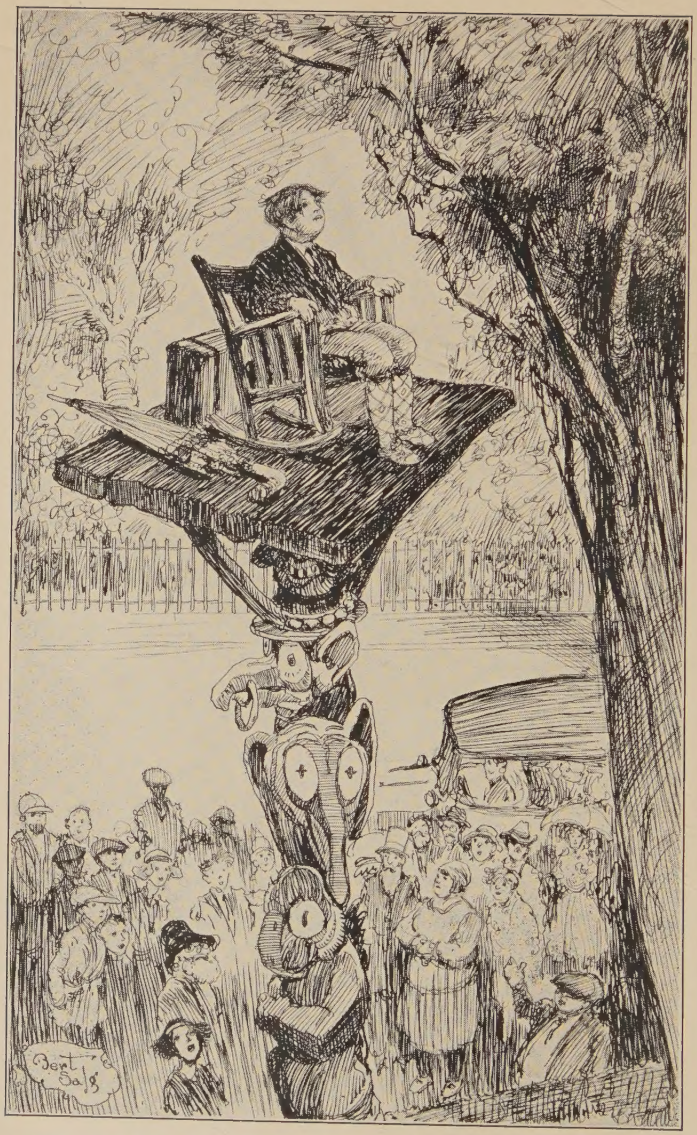
Street
Factory district
Main Street
Stores
Church
Canal
Old Carriage factory
School Street
Stores
Tutter Times
Jewelry Store
Grant St.
Poppy's home
Elm St.
Canal
To Ashton
TUTTER ILLINOIS

JERRY TODD
EDITOR-IN-GRIEF



RED LOOKED COMICAL SITTING UP THERE, HIS MUG SORT OF MATCHING THE CARVED FIGURES.

Jerry Todd Editor-in-Grief *Frontispiece* (*Page* 87)

JERRY TODD
EDITOR-IN-GRIEF

BY

LEO EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF
THE JERRY TODD BOOKS
THE POPPY OTT BOOKS
THE ANDY BLAKE BOOKS
THE TRIGGER BERG BOOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY

BERT SALG

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Made in the United States of America

To
Rudy, Tommy
and
Harold

OUR CHATTER-BOX

TO THE new readers of my books (this is Leo Edwards speaking), I will explain that "Our Chatter-Box" is a department open to all readers. In this department, which appears in all of my later books, the Jerry Todds, the Poppy Otts, the Andy Blakes and the Trigger Bergs, I will publish outstanding letters, poems (if your poem is printed you will receive an autographed copy of the book in which the poem appears), items of interest and club news.

Boys and girls reading my books seem to enjoy writing to me. And it is from this mass of letters that I select the material for this department.

Receiving thousands of letters yearly, it would be impossible, of course, for me to give all of these letters personal attention. The young writers don't expect that. They are satisfied for the most part in knowing that I read and enjoy each and every letter received.

My books, written for boys, are my message of friendship to the countless boys (and girls, too) who read these books. And the letters that I receive from my young readers are their message of enduring friendship to me.

Yes, sir, gang, I sure do enjoy your letters. They inspire me. So keep up the good work.

If you have written to me be sure and read each succeeding "Chatter-Box" as it appears. For your particular letter may have been included.

LETTERS

FIRST on the list is a letter from Sam Stratton of Rochester, N. Y.

"Jerry and his gang are my ideal of real boyhood," writes Sam. "And Tutter is my ideal of a real town. I like not only the mystery in your books but also the ever-present moral side of the books;

and especially the true friendship existing between the boys."

Louis D. Naffyger of Decatur, Ill., admits that he's a lucky boy, for his father, who runs a bookstore, sells the Jerry Todds and Poppy Otts. Easy enough for Louis to keep his library up-to-date—I can see that, all right.

And speaking of boys whose fathers run bookstores, I have a similar letter from Frederick Bland of Ripon, Wisc. Some day when I'm jumping around the landscape in my Essex I'm going to call on both of these young fans.

"Thanks for the autograph," writes Richard Barry of Ridgewood Station, L. I., N. Y. "I shall place it lovingly with the family relics consisting mainly of Grandpa's wig, Aunt Emma's false teeth and Pop's shaving mug."

"I have a dog named Lindy," writes Ed Schellhaas of Albany, N. Y. "Every ball he gets he tears apart. One day, up at our camp, my aunt made some chocolate filling for a pie; Lindy got into the filling, so there was no pie. I throw sticks and hide from him, but he always finds me, so keen is his sense of smell. When a ball game is on he watches his chance and runs off with the ball, making us chase him. He's some dog."

"To-day I earned $2.25 carrying in wood," writes Lawrence Haug of Sacramento, Calif. "I gave $1.25 to my mother and invested the other dollar in two Poppy Ott books, thus completing my set. Here are 5,000,000,000,000 cheers for you; and more power to you and Bert Salg. I am going to start a club, calling it The Tittering Totem."

And here's a letter from a boy in Burma:

"My father and mother are missionaries," writes Lewis Smith, in applying for membership in our Freckled Goldfish order. "I am twelve years old, an American, and go to school in the hills."

It is possible that some of you boys in America would like to write to this new member, so here's his complete address: Lewis Smith, A. B. Mission Press, Box 100, Rangoon, Burma.

"I like to imagine stories about Jerry and his pals," writes Andrew Thompson of Mt. Lebanon, Pittsburgh, Pa. "For instance, the gang finds an old chart telling where a certain treasure is buried on a small island in the Gulf of Mexico. The boys rebuild the *Sally Ann* and try out a new invention of Mr. Ricks', which sends out electrical waves which can be transformed into 'juice' for electric motors to run the ship."

Accompanying Andy's letter is a drawing of the

proposed ship, showing observation and control rooms, water tanks, storeroom, kitchen (with stovepipe!), wireless room, bathroom, tool chest and twin motors.

"Have Jerry and his gang go back to Oak Island and make a gunboat of the old scow," suggests Otis Thornton of New York City. "Work in lots of rotten eggs, clay balls, etc. And when the Strickers butt in as usual have Jerry bik them with the gunboat. Also have Jerry find the lost cats, dogs, rabbits, mice, etc. And have him live as a hermit in Bible Cave."

"When I feel gloomy," writes Donald E. Hoke of Park Ridge, Ill., "I just pick up one of your books and read it. In ten minutes I'm laughing so hard my mother wonders what came over me."

Robert Quinn of New Britain, Conn., signs his interesting letter: "Yours till the pixels in your eyes learn to play the drums in your ears."

"My friends and I have organized a Juvenile Jupiter Detective Club," writes David Duprey of New Iberia, La. "We are all Freckled Goldfish. In addition to having a big slingshot (like Jerry's) we have badges, and we expect to send you a picture of our clubhouse. Our dues are two cents a week."

"My friends and I have a circulating library of boys' books, and Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott play important parts," writes Robert Anderson of Jersey City, N. J. "The boys around my section of the city are very happy when a new book by you is published, as it affords them a good laugh in leisure time."

And here's a funny one (I think) written by Harvey Travis of Endicott, N. Y.

"My father," writes Harvey, "is an undertaker, having a funeral parlor where caskets are displayed and where bodies are prepared for burial. A man died by the name of Cochrane. When the body had been embalmed it was taken to the Cochrane home. Later my chums and I were playing hide and seek in the funeral parlor. I unfolded a big upholstered day bed, which has a thick mattress, and got into it, where I stretched out. Then my chum Al folded it up—with me in it, of course. I wasn't cramped at all: and could get plenty of air. When I talked it sounded as though I was down cellar. The boys who didn't know where I was sat on the day bed and I screeched at the top of my voice, but they never caught on. Al and I had them chasing all over the building. Suddenly, though, quiet came. My chums ran away—all except Al, who said to me, in a low voice:

"'Say, Harvey, there's a man here.'

"I thought he was fooling. So I kept on yelling. And pretty soon I heard a man's voice.

"'Could you tell me whether Mr. Cochrane is here?'

"'I don't think he's here,' said Al, who didn't know that Cochrane was dead. Then he turned to the day bed. 'Do you know where he is, Harvey?'

"'He's out at his old home,' I informed.

"And the man was so dumbfounded to hear a day bed speak (so Al told me later) that he dropped his hat. He fixed a sort of glassy stare on the day bed. Then scratching his head he began to edge toward the door. When he was gone, Al and I had a good laugh."

PICTURES

JACK CHAMPLIN of Fargo, S. D., is the first on the list to receive mention in this department. Sorry, Jack old pal, that I haven't a picture to send you in return—but you're such a good-looking guy I'm afraid you'd think you were getting cheated if I were to exchange pictures with you. If you are representative of what the Dakota boys are like I believe I'll come out there and live.

There's nothing sleepy-looking, let me tell you, about this next picture, of John McCaslin of Riverside, N. J. There's mischief in John's eyes. I bet he's a swell pal. "The other day," he writes, "I took one of my Todd books to school and almost every boy in my class wanted to borrow it." Maybe next time John will read one of my books to his schoolmates and thus become eligible for membership in our new School Club.

"So proud am I of my membership card," writes Carl Barnes of Woodcliff, N. J., "that I have had it framed. Having seen it, a number of my chums want me to help them organize a local Chapter."

In the picture that accompanies his letter Carl is all dolled up in a white shirt and necktie. A nice-looking boy; and a boy, I venture to say, who will be my pal for life.

Next comes a full-length picture of Leo J. Steinlein of New York City. "This serious pose," writes Leo, "was a favor to my older brothers, who took the picture. Later, when the picture was shown to a friend, he exclaimed: 'Who is it?—your father?'" Though he is only fourteen Leo says he's six feet tall. Some guy, huh?

Howard Beer of St. Stephen, N. B., sends me two pictures, one of his boat, *The Tittering Totem*, and the other of himself and his boy pal, Owen Budd. "The day I bought the *Bob-Tailed Elephant*," writes Howard, "I tried read-

ing the 'Chatter-Box' while riding my bicycle. Nor did I stop reading when I ran into a gutter and got a dump."

Nor must I by any chance overlook this picture of Nancy Chadwick of St. Louis, Mo. Mrs. Chadwick and a younger sister appear in the picture; and also here is a picture of Eleanor Souder of Dodge City, Kansas. Sure, she's a Freckled Goldfish.

In sending me his picture (he's a Boy Scout), Tom King of Stockdale, Texas, also included a frame. Thanks, Tom, not only for the picture but for your interesting and complimentary letter.

"I am sending you my picture," writes Leonard Rubin, Philadelphia, Pa., "so that you can see what a funny-looking Jerry Todd fan I am."

I don't know where Leonard gets the idea that he's funny-looking. He looks like a million dollars to me. And I'm happy in knowing that we'll always be pals.

POEMS

RUDY KOLAS, 6515 W. 16th St., Berwyn, Ill., is the author of our first poem.

The Gang

There's a boy named Jerry Todd,
The things he does are very odd,
He's in a gang, you see—
The leader is Scoop Ellery.

Second in command is Jerry Todd,
The guy I said was very odd.
Next in line is big Peg Shaw,
The huskiest kid you ever saw.

Red Meyers is a good little guy,
But so homely that even his mother does sigh.
Rory Ringer is a little shrimp—
A bloomin' Henglish himp.

Henny Bibbler belongs to the gang,
The plans he makes go over with a bang.
Right here and now I will mention
About the enemies' convention.

The leader is Bid Stricker.
A bully? Well, I should snicker.
Another gink is Jum Prater,
But he didn't join the gang till later.

Many times these gangs do fight.
But when they're through—oh, what a sight!
Bid's mouth is a mass of tomato seed,
And oh, oh, how Jum's nose does bleed!

Pretty good, Rudy. And here's hoping that you treasure the autographed book that is being sent to you.

Our second poem was composed in a very brilliant mo-

ment by Ray Taylor, 596 32nd St., Milwaukee, Wisc.

I got a book the other day
From a fellow who lives up our way.
I'll tell you something about it (and then let you guess)—
Let's see if you can meet with success.

As soon as I read a chapter
I wanted to read more.
It was packed with thrills,
Laughs and adventures galore.
The part where to laugh without fail
Is where the elephant loses his tail.

His tail mysteriously disappeared one night—
And without it he certainly looked a sight!
He lost it supposedly in a pocket of air.
Get this book so in the fun you can share.

As a book it certainly is a wow.
But I suppose you've all got it by now.
It's one of the latest Jerry Todd books out.
Now the name let us all shout:
Jerry Todd and the Bob-Tailed Elephant!

That wasn't half bad, Ray. Very probably Milton and Longfellow wrote better stuff —but what of that? And, of course, you, too, get an autographed book.

And here's another masterpiece, written by Fred Amann, 1018 N. Karlov Ave., Garfield Park Station, Chicago, Ill.

Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott—
They sure make us laugh a lot.
And in return, if you'll accept
This poem that for you I've kept,
My thanks to you will be profound—
I'll think of you the whole year 'round.

Hurray for Fred. Mail him a book—quick!

And here's one from Richard Barry, 69-12 Griffith Ave., Ridgewood Station, L. I., New York City, N. Y.

Sometimes I'm blue,
Have nothing to do,
And I think of you,
Jerry Todd.

I get a book
By hook or crook,
For you I look,
Jerry Todd.

I know your friend Red Meyers—
I'm acquainted with Poppy Ott, too.
I know the low-down Strickers,
And I "sabe" just what they do.

Well I soon hope to
Meet comical you,
And good luck—to who?—
Why, Jerry Todd!

Wrap up another book for Dick, the Bard of the Hudson River.

This one came from Earl Peacock a boy pal of mine living in Rockford, Ill., at 328 N. Winnebago St.

Jerry Todd, a scout is he,
He writes books for boys like me,
Poppy Ott is his pal,
They started a stilt factory and all is well.
Pedigreed Pickles they make to eat,
Which now are a great treat.

I hope those autographed books hold out—anyway, Earl, I'll see that you get one.

And here's another poem seemingly inspired by the *Bob-Tailed Elephant.* Al Hewitt of 1373 Park Boulevard, Camden, N. J., is the guilty author.

Elephunts is lots of fun
When ya watch 'em at the zoo.
But what if some one was to make
A present of one to you?

Not only that, but just suppose
The little feller's tail
Was bobbed; and then again
He ate hay by the bale?

Oh, it's all right to watch him,
Or just keep him for a day.
But— Then he gets stolen
And the fun begins—hurray!

A book for Al, of course—and I'm drawing a picture of a Freckled Goldfish in it.

Thomas English, 143 N. 62nd St., Philadelphia, Pa., contributes this one.

Lawyer Fuzzer has a little car
With brakes on all four wheels.
And every time that Fuzzer stops
The darn thing always squeals.

When Fuzzer drives to town,
The car makes lots of noise—
It makes the people laugh with scorn,
To see him lose his poise.

Sure thing, Tom. You get a book, too—if I can't find anything else to send you I'll send you the doctor book that Trigger Berg tells about in his diary.

The last one is the brain child of Francis Byrd, P. O. Box 500, Elgin, Ill.

Jerry Todd, a fine kid is he—
A detective of the Juvenile Jupiter clan.
He intends to be a real detective
When he's a full-grown man.

And now, having read these inspiring masterpieces, I can imagine how not less than

seven hundred and seventy-two Jerry Todd fans are sharpening their pencils to show me (in poetry) what they can do. All right, gang. Send your stuff in. I'll try hard to use it.

FRECKLED GOLDFISH

NOT long ago we organized a club called the Secret and Mysterious Order of the Freckled Goldfish—the club getting its name from the Ott book of that title. To-day we have more than 5,000 members.

The club is purely a "fun" proposition. There are no dues (except as required in local Chapters); and the responsibilities are light. If you have a kindly feeling toward Poppy, Jerry, Andy and Trigger, you are eligible to join.

Mr. Bert Salg, the popular illustrator of these books, designed the membership card, which contains a comical picture of Poppy's Freckled Goldfish, together with the general rules and regulations—all printed on the card. Then, too, each card contains my own personal autograph.

Any boy can join who wants to. It will cost you four cents in stamps—four one-cent stamps or two two-cent stamps. One red stamp will pay the postage on your membership card and button; the other red stamp will partly cover the cost of the envelope, card and button.

In applying for membership please observe these simple rules:

(1) Print your name plainly.

(2) Supply your complete (printed) address.

(3) Give your age.

(4) Enclose two two-cent stamps—or four one-cent stamps.

(5) Address your letter to:

Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

LOCAL CHAPTERS

WE HAVE a printed ritual which any boy who wants to start a Freckled Goldfish Club in his own neighborhood can't afford to be without. This booklet tells how to organize the club, how to conduct meetings, how to transact all club business, and, probably most important of all, how to initiate candidates.

Three chief officers will be required to put on the initiation, which can be given in any boy's home, so, unless each officer is provided with a booklet, much memorizing will have to be done. The best plan is to have three booklets to a lodge. These may be secured (at cost) at six cents each (three two-cent stamps) or three for sixteen cents (eight two-cent stamps).

Address all orders to:
Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

BUTTONS!

YES, gang, we now have buttons! New members will get their buttons along with their membership cards. Old members will please enclose a two-cent stamp, in applying for buttons. Where several buttons are sent to one address, only one two-cent stamp is required. To secure buttons, you *must* supply the number of your membership card. And be sure and *print* your complete name and address.

CLUB NEWS

I HAVE organized a Chapter of the boys in the 8A class of the Argonne school," writes Robert Wenburg of San Francisco, California—and to date cards and buttons have been sent to fifteen boys. Quite some Chapter!

And why not more of these school Chapters? Maybe you could get permission to hold your meetings in one of the schoolrooms.

"I showed my membership card to my pals," writes Jim Carey of Grayville, Ill. "They like it. So we are going to organize a local Chapter, holding our meetings in my Dad's barn."

Billy Babcock of Ft. Worth, Texas, reports on his Chapter as follows:

"We are using our Scout room for a pool and have a keen overflow. We have a hard time keeping sharks from bothering us! The members elected me Gold Fin because I was the chief organizer. Each boy joining has to read aloud a chapter of the *Freckled Goldfish* book."

"Our Chapter," reports Howard W. Hoadley of Findlay, Ohio, "held a Hallowe'en party at the home of Bob Rogge. We had three contests, Bob, John Wallen and Blain Gillespie winning the prizes. John read a story: 'The Ghost Talks.' We served lunch, but when we went to get the cider it was gone!"

"We have organized a Chapter," reports Bob Hays of Tulsa, Okla. "Could you suggest some club activities outside of the regular routine?"

Many organizers have put that question up to me. So I'm going to publish several letters which will show you what some of the Chapters are doing in addition to holding initiations and "feeds."

"I have two electric motors that we are going to experiment with," reports Bob Halligan of Ozone Park, L. I., N. Y. "Also one of the members has a set of boxing gloves. I have a regulation football

and we may be able to organize a team later in the season. Also we have plenty of baseballs, bats, etc. Our meetings are held in my cellar. Told by the teacher to write a composition I decided to write about our club. The teacher said it was very interesting. Of course, I didn't reveal any of the secrets. At present we have nine members."

And here's Bob's later report:

"Our Chapter held a big Hallowe'en party. First we had ghost stories, dancing, singing and biting money out of apples. Then 'eats.' We had apples, grapes, nuts, candy, fruit punch and cake. Then the real fun began—ducking for apples and money! I went after a nickel in the tub. I took a deep breath and went under. But I couldn't find the nickel. When I came up for air I found my shirt and tie were wet. We had regular printed tickets which we sold. The tickets (printed at school) read like this:

HALLOWE'EN PARTY
For the benefit of
The Freckled Goldfish
Ozone Park Branch
9115-107 Avenue
At 4:30 O'clock
Admission—10 cents

"We cleared $3.25 and now have in the treasury $5.50."

Wanting a clubhouse in which to hold their Chapter meetings, Herbert du Russel and his pals of New York City built themselves a hut in a vacant lot.

"By good luck I moved to the Bronx," writes Herb. "It is just like living in the country. We have weekly meetings. The dues are 10 cents each meeting. We have robes made of sheets and have hoods, or masks with a hood attached. Each member has one. We also have pictures of fish in front of the robes and in back. We sure have fun. For initiation we take off the candidate's shoes and make him walk on something cold. We have other stunts, too."

And now I'm going to reproduce several letters from Norman Wengert of Milwaukee, Wis., which will show Chapter leaders what one live boy is doing in the way of building up his Chapter, for the benefit of himself and his chums.

Norman first wrote to me on October 13. Joining the order, he later organized a Chapter. His first report is dated November 5.

"We had the first meeting of this Chapter on November 2. We did not send for the membership cards till we had our first meeting, because we wanted to wait till we had permanent officers. Before the initiation the officers were as follows: G. F., Nor-

man Wengert; S. F., Gordon Lewis; F. F., Jack Bassett. After voting for permanent officers: G. F., Jack Bassett; S. F., Gordon Lewis; F. F., Norman Wengert. We decided that G. F. should be president; S. F., treasurer; and F. F., secretary and scribe. We are going to have checker contests, domino contests and pool contests. I will let you know how these turn out. We decided to have meetings each week and pay five cents dues per week. We have a banner. Our rules are as follows:

1 Officers must earnestly perform their duties.

2 Members should be respectful to officers.

3 Members should be on time at the meetings.

4 Members should perform all duties assigned to them.

5 Members may be fined from one to five cents for:

a Being late without a good excuse.

b Not coming at all without a good excuse.

c Not obeying the officers or rules.

d Making too much noise."

A later report from Norman is dated November 18.

"We held our second meeting on November 16. Every boy was present. The meeting was called to order at seven-twenty. Then the treasurer received the dues, giving us a total in the treasury of 45 cents. We also voted to let Edward Hahn enter if he passes the tests. I said it would be better if the meetings were held in the afternoon instead of in the evening, but my cause was lost. We collected 14 cents in fines. When all business was finished the first checker match was played, Lewis Randall winning two games out of three."

Norman's next report is dated December 6.

"At our last meeting we took in two more members. First we used the initiation in the ritual; then we used some of the things in the initiation in the back of the *Purring Egg* book. After the initiation the checker game was continued."

"At our first meeting last night," writes John Hughes of Hudson, Wisc., "we initiated nine members, which was one more than we had planned on. Hereafter we're going to take in only one or two at a time."

Having organized a local Chapter, Howard Babcock of Ft. Worth, Texas, reports as follows:

"I belong to a Scout troop and we are going to name our patrol Freckled Goldfish, conducting our patrol meetings in the regular Freckled Goldfish way."

"Our Chapter has five members," reports Vincent Groupe of Philadelphia, Pa. "I am S. F. The dues are

five cents a week. We have special buttons (of our own make) and gowns, as recommended in the ritual."

MORE LETTERS

WANTING your latest book," writes Earl Cleave of Berkeley, Calif., "I went to a bookstore, asking the clerk where the Todd and Ott books were. They were upstairs, I was told. I started up those stairs so fast the air burned from the friction. A case of books was pointed out to me. I ran over. But not a Jerry Todd or a Poppy Ott book could I find. Gee! I almost collapsed. Then the lady came over and said: 'Here they are, little boy.' I guess you can imagine my relief."

Which reminds me of a Milwaukee, Wisconsin, boy whose mother took him downtown to buy him a "classic." A three-dollar book was picked out (so the clerk told me). And then Junior set up a howl. "Three dollars for one book!" he yelled. "Why, I can get six Jerry Todds for that much money. And I guess I'd rather have six Jerry Todds than one classic." I'm hoping, though, that he got both.

"In pattern of Jerry and his gang," writes David Hinkley of White Plains, N. Y., "I've made a big slingshot that shoots a brick a block. Further, I've made some stilts like Poppy's. The boys razz me because I am so small. So, like Red Meyers, I'm going to eat like a horse and grow big. Don't you think it would be better to publish more books? Often I lay in bed thinking what I wouldn't give to be in Jerry's shoes."

Other boys, too, insist that I write more books. One boy thought it would be fine if I published a new book each month, for he wants more "Chatter-Boxes." It's my plan now to write four books a year, one Todd, one Ott, one Blake and one Berg. I couldn't possibly do more than that. For many times it takes me more than two months to complete a book.

"My gang," writes Teddy O'Brien of Geneva, N. Y., "tries to be like Jerry and his gang, but nothing exciting ever turns up. Still, we had one hot adventure the day we drove a lot of hornets out of Cliff Mooney's barn with a garden hose."

Which reminds me of the time when I was a boy that we fought bumblebees in a hollow tree. Boy, what those honey harvesters did to us! For weeks afterwards if I heard anything like a buzz behind me I jumped a foot.

And here's a letter from a Western boy, Chandler Smith of Gaviota, Calif., who, living on a ranch, tells about a waterfall in a park near his

home. "It's a dandy place to climb," writes Chandler. "I bet if Jerry Todd and the rest of his gang were here they'd have a lot of fun."

How about it, Jerry?—would you like to be there? I sure would. I reckon Chandler (the lucky dog!) rides bucking bronchos and everything else, stuff that we see only in the movies.

"How would it be," suggests Marion Page of Columbus, Ga., "if Jerry and Poppy found less buried treasure? In almost every book there is something about a buried treasure or else they get a small fortune or a reward for something. I don't want to 'knock' your books, but I think there is too much of the 'treasure' stuff in them."

Which is a fine criticism. But Marion (who reads all of my books) mustn't overlook the fact that hundreds of thousands of boys read only two or three at the most. In writing a long series of books about the same boys there is bound to be much repetition. That is the drawback of series books. If I have used certain characters in one book they stand ready made for the next book. So whatever originality a writer has he undergoes a sort of "choking" process. Further, I know, from the thousands of letters that I get from boys, what they like in books of the type I write. That is why I have employed the "treasure" idea so often. Yet, in checking back through my books, I find I haven't used the "treasure" idea so often, after all. In the Todd series only three books employ the "treasure" idea, and only one in the Ott series, to date.

OUR SCHOOL CLUB

I AM going to start a new club to be known as our "School Club." And here's the idea: Just as my Jerry Todd, Poppy Ott and Trigger Berg books are written primarily to fill the lives of boys with clean, natural fun, so also would I like to have my young readers share this book fun of theirs with others. Which can be done individually if you will prevail upon your teacher to read one of my Todd, Ott or Berg books aloud. That will be fun for the whole room. Do you get my point? I might mention, too, that these books are written to read aloud.

If your teacher, through your personal efforts, reads one of my books to the school, you automatically become a member of our "School Club," and should so notify me. Your name will be published in this column. Also at the end of each year, the names of all members will be put "into the hat." Ten names will be drawn at random. And each of these ten boys or

girls (the second year we'll draw twenty names and the third year thirty) will receive an autographed copy of my latest book. The names of club members once receiving awards will not be included in later drawings. Members joining the first year will have their names published each year for three years, after which we may want to make some changes in the club, probably retiring the older members.

The first list of names of all members and book winners will be published in *Trigger Berg and the Sacred Pig*. Pretty soft, huh, if we have only ten members the first year! For then, of course, each member will receive a free book. But I bet you we'll have more than ten members the second year. And how great will be our satisfaction to know that we are spreading the fun that my books contain. For true happiness lies in sharing what we have with others.

TRIGGER BERG

THOUSANDS of you boys, I dare say, have already seen and read my two *Trigger Berg* books, the first of a new series. Trigger is very dear to me. Fair and square all the way through—that's the kind of a little lad he is. It would seem, though, that there's nothing within a radius of fifty miles of his home that he doesn't get into. As a result of this insuppressed energy he frequently finds himself in hot water, all of which helps imbue the books with clean, boyish fun. You'll find him a pal worth having. And his buddies, Slats, Friday and Tail Light, are of the same stamp.

It would make me exceedingly happy if you would write a letter telling me what you think of Trigger. If you share my affection for him, tell me what inspires the corresponding warmth in your own heart. Or, if he bores you, tell me what's wrong with him, according to your ideas. For I want these books to stand out. I want them to be my best. So you can see why I value your opinion.

Two titles are listed:

Trigger Berg and the Treasure Tree.

Trigger Berg and His 700 Mouse Traps.

And coming soon is *Trigger Berg and the Sacred Pig*. Nor will the odd little pig featured in this promising story be the only one who "squeals" when you get the story into your hands. You'll very probably do considerable squealing yourself, along with your chuckling and giggling.

COMMENTS

THAT is all for this time, fellows. If you haven't read the earlier "Chatter-

Boxes" please refer to them. This is our seventh "Chatter-Box." Added news will be contained in the "Chatter-Box" in *Andy Blake and the Pot of Gold*, now on sale. If you are a Freckled Goldfish I imagine you'll particularly enjoy the Club News contained in this volume. Write to me often.

Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

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LEO EDWARDS' BOOKS

Here is a list of Leo Edward's published books:

THE JERRY TODD SERIES

JERRY TODD AND THE WHISPERING MUMMY
JERRY TODD AND THE ROSE-COLORED CAT
JERRY TODD AND THE OAK ISLAND TREASURE
JERRY TODD AND THE WALTZING HEN
JERRY TODD AND THE TALKING FROG
JERRY TODD AND THE PURRING EGG
JERRY TODD IN THE WHISPERING CAVE
JERRY TODD, PIRATE
JERRY TODD AND THE BOB-TAILED ELEPHANT
JERRY TODD, EDITOR-IN-GRIEF
JERRY TODD, CAVEMAN
JERRY TODD AND THE FLYING FLAPDOODLE
JERRY TODD AND THE BUFFALO BILL BATHTUB

THE POPPY OTT SERIES

POPPY OTT AND THE STUTTERING PARROT
POPPY OTT'S SEVEN-LEAGUE STILTS
POPPY OTT AND THE GALLOPING SNAIL
POPPY OTT'S PEDIGREED PICKLES
POPPY OTT AND THE FRECKLED GOLDFISH
POPPY OTT AND THE TITTERING TOTEM
POPPY OTT AND THE PRANCING PANCAKE
POPPY OTT HITS THE TRAIL

THE TUFFY BEAN SERIES

TUFFY BEAN'S PUPPY DAYS
TUFFY BEAN'S ONE-RING CIRCUS
TUFFY BEAN AT FUNNY-BONE FARM
TUFFY BEAN AND THE LOST FORTUNE

THE ANDY BLAKE SERIES

ANDY BLAKE
ANDY BLAKE'S COMET COASTER
ANDY BLAKE'S SECRET SERVICE
ANDY BLAKE AND THE POT OF GOLD

JERRY TODD, EDITOR-IN-GRIEF

CHAPTER I

THE REJECTED TOTEM POLE

It was in June that Mrs. Gussie Pangborn, of Chicago, bustled into town with her undersized, meek-eyed husband, the new owner and editor of the *Tutter Daily Globe.* Curious to see what the newcomers were like (yet sorry to lose Mr. Stair, the old editor, whose family had moved to California) the hospitable Tutter people put on a big reception in Clark's Hall, which was the night that Red Meyers and Rory Ringer drank a whole gallon of pink lemonade. Leave it to Red to make a pig of himself! Every time. And having made a particular chum of Rory, the little English kid who recently moved into our neighborhood, the latter, of course, feels in duty bound to follow in the freckled leader's footsteps.

I like Rory. Slender and black-eyed, with black curly hair and a happy-go-lucky grin, he's a good kid, even if he does make an awful mess of his "H's," calling owls "howls" and

hawks " 'awks." If you want to laugh yourself sick drop in at our school some afternoon when he's reciting. You'll understand then why he's so well-liked. For a kid of that type is bound to make a hit anywhere.

Red, too, is popular. Freckled-faced, gabby little runt that he is, it's generally acknowledged that he's the biggest monkey in our school. He and Rory are a good pair. Nor do they ever quarrel, which is the surprising thing to me. For Red's temper is just as fiery as his hair.

If you have read the preceding books of this series, starting with *Jerry Todd and the Whispering Mummy,* in which book we began our joint career as Juvenile Jupiter Detectives, you'll need no lengthy introduction to Red. Other members of our gang are Scoop Ellery, the leader, whose pa runs a candy store (um-yum-yum!) and Peg Shaw. Good old Peg! He provides the "brawn" for our gang and Scoop provides the brains—which isn't saying, though, that the rest of us are dumb. I should hope not. But every gang needs a leader. And we've found out that Scoop, with his ready wits, is much better fitted for leadership than the rest of us, with the possible exception of Poppy Ott, another good pal of mine around whom I have written a number of books. But Poppy happened to be out of town when this particular adventure took place. So it will be

best, I think, to say very little about him.

Red's parents had earlier started east in a new automobile to see the Bunker Hill monument and other historic sights, leaving the family nest egg (or should I call him a turkey egg?) to the tender mercies of Mrs. Pansy Biggle, an aunt, who runs a beauty parlor on School Street, as mentioned in some of my earlier books. And when I further explain that it was Aunt Pansy, a great social worker, who mixed up the pink lemonade the night of the big reception, you can readily understand how Red and Rory happened to get such an easy crack at it—meaning the lemonade, of course, and not the elaborate reception itself.

Yes, sir, that was a big night. For there was cake, too, and fancy cookies with nuts on them. Dad was there, all lit up in his party suit. And Mother wore a green dress that shone just like silver. I want to tell you that she looked swell. To that point, all of the Tutter ladies were dolled up fit to kill. For word had been passed around that Mrs. Gussie, with the advantages of the city behind her, was the acme of style, or whatever you call it. And naturally the Tutter ladies wanted to hold their own. Women are that way.

It was while Mrs. Gussie was making her windy speech of appreciation for the splendid hospitality thus extended to her and her less forward-acting mate that Red and Rory got

into the pink lemonade. And worst of all, like the big dumb-bell that he is, Red tried to improve its flavor by sinking licorice drops into it. Descending on him like an infuriated steam roller (for she weighs nearly three hundred pounds) Aunt Pansy almost yanked him baldheaded, after which, of course, she had the job of retrieving the sunken licorice drops.

Finding that the other women were perfectly willing to let her run things, and eager to show off what she had learned in the city, Mrs. Gussie organized a Civic Art and Culture League. What Tutter needed, she expounded, as president of the new society, was culture. We had been so busy building factories and raising garden truck, she said, that we had lost sight of the artistic ideals necessary to proper social development. And it was made plain to the town's citizens in general, whether they liked it or not, that the ambitious organizer was determined to dish out the culture stuff to them in big gobs. She was that kind of a woman.

I wasn't interested in the important-acting newcomer and her "culture" stuff. That was out of my line. But I heard a lot about it at home, Mother having enthusiastically joined the art crusaders, or whatever you care to call them. I heard, too, that Poppy's father had bought the big totem pole that played such a prominent part in one of my recent books.

Later word was passed around that Mr. Ott intended to present the unusual totem pole to the town, through the Boy Scouts. And preliminary arrangements were made to erect the pole in the public square. Which was the thing, so to speak, that touched off the dynamite, sort of splitting up the town into opposing factions, the men and boys on one side and the women (under Mrs. Gussie's domineering and determined leadership) on the other.

The ambitious newcomer didn't register very highly with Dad and the other husbands. For they saw how bossy she was. And considerable sympathy was expressed on the side for her poor henpecked husband, supposedly the newspaper's voice of authority, but who, it was quickly learned, did all of his editing according to his wife's dictations. Nor would she trust him to pick out his own neckties, which explained why he always wore black ones. Liking color himself, and wanting to assert his rights, he appeared at the breakfast table one morning with a red necktie draped around his skinny windpipe (so the story goes), which so shocked his artistic-tempered mate that she upset the coffeepot on the family poodle. A *red* necktie! Horror of horrors! The floodgates of her outraged oratory, so to speak, were flung wide open. So it isn't to be wondered at that poor Mr. Pangborn's faded blue eyes held a sort of trembling, hunted look when he later

appeared in the streets wearing the usual black necktie, which had the appearance of having been hastily knotted. And thereafter the neighborhood's understanding husbands sympathetically dubbed him Mr. Jiggs, after the old geezer in the funny pictures. So if I have occasion to refer to him again I, too, will call him Mr. Jiggs.

But though he plainly lacked backbone, he sure knew his galleys. For the *Globe,* under his management, was just as well printed as when Mr. Stair owned it. Mrs. Gussie, though, cut out all of the funny pictures, particularly the strip featuring Jiggs and Maggie, certain annoying stories having come to her ears, I guess. Even less than being artistic the comics were vulgar, she learnedly propounded to the club women, who found this new interest of theirs quite exciting.

I guess you can imagine how tickled the Boy Scouts were, chief among them Rory and Red, when word was passed around that the big totem pole, with its memorable associations, was on its way to town. Eager to see it, the Scouts went down the river road in a body to meet it, later proudly escorting it into town, where it was unloaded in the public square. Important dedication ceremonies would follow, the pleased Scoutmaster told us. And we were instructed to be on hand the following Saturday afternoon in spick-and-span uniforms.

Told that a totem pole was about to be erected in the public square, in tribute to the local Boy Scouts, Mrs. Gussie, after a horrified gasp or two, got into action.

"If we, as art patrons, are to degenerate to the standards of uncultured savages to please our Boy Scouts," she wrote seethingly in her husband's newspaper, "why, pray, should we stop with totem poles? Why not emulate the Australian head-hunters? Surely a string of dried human heads on each street corner, a tribute to our Girl Scouts, would be quite as fitting."

Then she wound up:

"The wives and mothers of this community, banded together in the interests of true culture, with the future of our children and the intellectual welfare of our little city at heart, will make it their duty to see that our public square —where visitors form their opinion of our civic intelligence—is *not* desecrated by this hideous monstrosity, however pleasing its erection might be to a group of excitable boys. The time has come for Tutter to awaken to its higher responsibilities and opportunities. Let us raise aloft the glorious lamp of culture and thus drive out the cringing shadows of ignorance and indifference. The public square, our community's soul, as it were, must not be defiled. If anything is to be erected there, let it be a true work of art, lofty in execution and

inspirational to its beholders. Our city beautiful! Let that be our slogan. Let us turn aside from all that is inelegant, as we would shun a serpent, and seek that which is glorious and beautiful. . . . *Down with the totem pole!*"

As a matter of fact the Boy Scouts were kind of disappointed that Mr. Ott hadn't given them the pole outright for use in their own camp, which was the proper place for it, the art crusaders declared, chief among them the leader herself. But that editorial of hers, and later ones, in which she even ridiculed old Mr. Ott himself, made us sore. Dad got kind of peeved, too, as did many of the other husbands. And so, as I say, it wasn't long before the town was split up into opposing factions, the men, on our side, arguing for the pole and the women, under Mrs. Gussie's grim leadership, arguing against it.

Even Mother tried to tell me that the public square was no place for our swell totem pole, which got my goat. Thus far in my life I've never sassed my parents. For I love them too much to ever want to say mean things to them. But that was one time, let me tell you, when I almost got sassy. And it kind of disappointed me, too, to think that Mother, usually so smart and capable, could be so easily misled.

"Some day," I told her, sorry that she had turned against me, "you're going to wake up."

"But why do you insist on erecting the ugly

pole in our public square? Why don't you carry it out to your camp, as Mrs. Pangborn suggests?"

"Because," I stiffened, "Mr. Ott bought it for the public square, and that's where it's going up."

Calling a meeting, the men wrote up an editorial favoring the totem pole. But Mr. Jiggs made all kinds of excuses when the article was submitted to him, finally admitting, as he looked over his shoulder to make sure that his wife wasn't within earshot, that he didn't dare to publish it. So, unable to make any progress, the men finally dropped the matter, having other things of more importance to think about.

"I still maintain," Dad told me sympathetically, "that Mrs. Pangborn is unfair. But she has the power of the press behind her. And without a similar mouthpiece we can do nothing."

"How about old Mr. Kepp?" I spoke hopefully.

Dad laughed. And I knew why. For old Cassibaum Kepp's weekly newspaper, the *Tutter Times,* is a joke. Sometimes two weeks will elapse between issues, so you can imagine how entertaining the "news" is when the paper finally comes out. More like ancient history. Poor health and the need of doing all of his own work, typesetting, printing and everything, coupled with a lack of money, is

the combined handicap that Mr. Kepp has to fight against.

The shabby, dingy print shop on Canal Street is the ridicule of experienced newspaper men. Yet it was a promising business in its younger days. No home-talent play was complete without the peppy young editor, I've been told. It's hard to believe, though, that the old man, now so slovenly and out-of-date in his methods, used to impersonate stage girls so cleverly that the entire audience was deceived, such being his peculiar talents. Still, that's Dad's story. So it must be true.

Like the other Boy Scouts I felt pretty hot toward Mrs. Pangborn over our defeat. And maybe you think we didn't glare at her when we met her in the streets. Gr-r-r-r! But small boys were beneath her notice.

Then the dark clouds, in part, sort of rolled away, as it were. For Red and Rory, determined to gain their ends, got jobs in old Cassibaum's print shop. They would work for nothing, they told the pottering, weary-acting proprietor, if he'd write up editorials in our favor and print extra copies of the newspaper for free distribution. More than that, Red promised, the town's entire Boy Scout organization would turn advertising and subscription solicitors, thus putting the wabbly weekly back on its feet.

Which, I suppose, was good news to the disheartened printer.

And so, along with my chums, I shortly found myself with a newspaper on my hands. For no sooner did we get out the special issue that I'm going to tell you about, than old Cassibaum, whose mind had been wrecked by business worries of long standing, was taken away to the cuckoo house.

Leaving *us* in charge of the newspaper, mind you! Gosh! I guess you can see, all right, what's coming. For there's nothing in this world, let me tell you, that can get a bunch of inexperienced kids into more hot water than a newspaper.

Nor were we very long finding it out, either.

CHAPTER II

AN AMAZING OFFER

Rory had a particular interest in the unusual totem pole, which, when we first caught sight of it in the woods, under conditions that chilled our backbones, as recorded, stood thirty feet out of the ground, its eleven carved figures (birds, beasts and the like) resting one on top of another. Crowning all—sort of presiding over the other grotesque figures, as it were—was an odd old man in a high hat. Not until the very end of our amazing adventure did we learn who had been the model, so to speak, for this mysterious sphinx-like figure. But it you have read the exciting story you'll remember that there was a distant relationship between Rory's people and the man around whom the crazy tittering mystery revolved. In fact, it was from Mr. Ringer that Poppy's father purchased the odd pole. So you can see why Rory in particular was all worked up over Mrs. Gussie's spiteful editorials. In a way it was *his* pole. And he was eager to get even with her for all the mean things she had said about it.

Going to Red with his troubles, the latter had promptly picked off the sensible conclusion that the only way to combat Mrs. Gussie, and possibly turn the tide in favor of the Boy Scouts, was through the run-down *Tutter Times*. So, as I say, they had made a lot of big promises to old Cassibaum, telling him that if he'd help them they in turn would help him. And having been called in to do my part, as a loyal Boy Scout, I found one of the willing new assistants climbing around the ancient press with a long-snouted oil can in his grimy mitt, while the other worker was giving the cluttered shop its first real sweeping in years.

"Ker-*choo-o-o!*" I sneezed, as the dust got into my nostrils.

"Hi, Jerry Todd," Red beamed at me through the clouds of dust stirred up by his active broom. "Did you hear the good news?"

"Sure thing," I heaved up another healthy sneeze.

"Boy," he beamed, swabbing his dripping face, "I bet we make that old girl in the *Globe* office take a back seat when we get into high gear."

I looked around.

"But where's old Cassibaum?" I inquired curiously.

"Oh, I sent him over to the public library," the ambitious sweeper further swished his broom around.

"What for?"

"To study up on totem poles. For he's going to be our chief editorial writer."

"To hear you talk," I said, "anyone would think that you owned this newspaper already."

"It needs someone like me around here," said he, in that important way of his, which sometimes gets my goat.

"And what's your title?" I gave him a dig. "Official sweeper?"

He puffed out his chest.

"Look me over, unconscious," said he. "I'm the new Editor-in-Chief."

"Don't tell me," I fired back at him, "that you're actually going to run the newspaper."

"And why not?" he grinned.

Why not! *Him* run a newspaper! Good grief! I could imagine, all right, where he'd wind up. For his brains are all in his feet.

"Heaven help the subscribers," said I, fervent-like, "if you do run it."

A serious look then chased itself into his freckled face.

"That's the trouble, Jerry," said he earnestly. "There aren't any subscribers."

"None at all?" I said, surprised.

"Oh, I guess there's a few—maybe a hundred or two. But that isn't enough to pay the ink bill. We've got to have at least a thousand subscribers. I've promised old Cassibaum that we'll get them for him, too. Peg ought to

be a good one to boss that job. He can tell the Scouts what to do. And we'll let Scoop handle the advertising."

"What do I do?" I inquired, kind of hating to have him lord it over me that way, but still willing to do my part.

"You're going to be the head reporter, Jerry," he shoved another grin at me.

"How lovely!" I purred.

"You gather the news and we print it. Do you see?"

"And isn't it true," I inquired, "that a newspaper reporter always gets free tickets to church suppers and things like that?"

Which was something he hadn't thought of.

"I'll report on the suppers," said he hastily, working his belt buckle.

"Like so much mud," I fired back at him, big pig that he was.

He drew himself up.

"Please don't overlook the fact," said he, with dignity, "that you're addressing the Editor-in-Chief."

"And you really mean to tell me," I pinned him down, "that old Cassibaum is going to let you run the newspaper?"

"Absolutely and nothing else but," he stepped around importantly.

"Good-by," I started off.

But I didn't mean it. And later, when we were all organized, I worked just as hard as

the other fellows to put the wabbly weekly back on its feet. But it was an uphill job. For the Tutter people had long ago lost confidence in old Cassibaum. They couldn't make themselves believe that the run-down newspaper would ever come back. It had been a power in its day, but those days were gone forever. As for Mrs. Gussie, when word reached her that the local Boy Scouts were going to carry on their fight for the totem pole through the editorial columns of the *Tutter Times,* she split her attack, declaring that the *Times,* under our loose management, would be a menace to the community, bringing down on the town the ridicule of its neighbors. For how could boys of our age, she blaa-blaaed, be expected to know anything about newspaper finesse? No thinking citizen, she wound up, would support us in our new enterprise.

Which made it all the harder for us to get a start. For the women, even our own mothers, were against us. At times I felt kind of discouraged. Then I'd get fighting mad. The old gab-bag! It certainly was an unlucky day for us when Chicago kissed her good-by. Our loss and their gain, so to speak.

Red and Rory made a new place of the cluttered print shop. A wagon load of truck, consisting mostly of mangled paper and similar press offal, the accumulation of years, was dumped into the alley. And from old Cassi-

baum's living quarters in the back rooms more junk was gotten rid of. As for the wabbly-kneed old printer himself, he watched the transformation with vague, changing eyes. Nor did we sense any danger in his restless manner. He acted queer, of course. That was generally acknowledged. But we readily made excuses for him. In the first place, we said, he was a very old man. And the sudden change in his fortunes from cold to hot was overwhelming. But we were soon to learn the truth. His mind was sort of wavering, like a dangerously balanced rock, on the edge of a precipice.

"I swan!" he murmured vaguely, when his two sweating assistants further washed the front windows, long given over to spiders and their kind. "I swan! It doesn't seem like the same place."

Rory then took him over to the aged press.

"Hi cleaned the 'ole bloomin' thing from top to bottom," he bragged, dragging a dirty hand across his damp forehead.

A wan smile crept into the old man's grizzled face.

"I hope," he feebly attempted a joke, "that you'll be as successful with your own face as you were with the press."

Red gave a yip.

"Haw! haw! haw!" he boomed in his characteristic way. "Go squint at yourself in the mirror, Rory. You look like a nigger."

"You're both good boys," the old man spoke feelingly, as he touched the cleaned press with loving hands. "And I am deeply indebted to you." Then he went on: "I—I suppose I am old-fashioned and out-of-date. I've been told so many times. And my failing business proves that I haven't been as progressive as I should. But with your kindly help—and what wonderful things are young legs and young minds!—I'm hopeful that other favorable changes will be wrought here."

Pride showed in his manner. Yet, as he drew himself up, I couldn't help but notice how shabby his clothes were, and how loosely they fitted him. Was he hungry? I wondered.

"This," he gestured, taking in the print shop with a sweep of his trembling hand, "was once a busy place. All of the county's official printing was done here. And the newspaper that had its birth here, shortly after my graduation from college, was the district's most influential mouthpiece. Politicians sought my favor. Distinguished visitors stopped here to pay me their respects, notably among them that great journalistic genius, Mark Twain himself."

Then the warmth seemed to die out of his eyes.

"But those days are gone forever. An old fogy! That's what they call me now. And who wants to subscribe to, or advertise in, an

old fogy's newspaper? A has-been! A failure! It was the applause that turned my head. I would write a play myself, I said. I sought world fame. And in that, too, I failed—utterly and completely."

The poor old man! He was thinking, in a scattered way, of those early days on the stage, when his female-impersonation stuff, or whatever you call it, had made such a hit with the local show-goers.

"And how are you coming along with the editorials?" Red then inquired.

"Editorials?" the word was repeated slowly, as the speaker struggled with his memory.

"The totem-pole editorials," Red amplified.

"Oh, yes. I understand. My plan as yet is incomplete, but I think that I will be able to convince the Tutter people that the rejected totem pole is just as fine a piece of art, in its class, as any of those famous groups in the art centers of Europe. Everything must have a beginning, art and culture included. Carved wooden poles represent such a step in sculpture. If we are to ignore these primitive attempts in the world of art, we must also ignore all similar steps leading to artistic perfection. That isn't historically consistent. The whole success of our country—of the world, in fact—depends upon our boys. They are our mighty statesmen and great financiers in the making. So, according to my precepts, what could be

more fitting than the erection of this totem pole to our Boy Scouts? It is a native milestone in the upward trend of American art. And boys of themselves are milestones in to-morrow's world affairs."

"Atta-boy!" applauded Red. "You've got the right idea, Mr. Kepp. Give us stuff like that for the newspaper and we'll have old lady Pangborn eating out of our hands."

The printer, once so tall and straight, no doubt, but now stooped and pottering, with nervous manners and restless eyes, had long been a familiar sight to me. But never having come in close contact with him I had given no thought to his failing affairs. I saw now, though, that he was a fine old gentleman, sort of beaten down by his failures, but still as ready with his editorial pen as was Mrs. Gussie herself. He was worth helping, all right. And it was my big hope that we could do a lot for him. What a lonely life he had lived, I thought. But he would be lonely no longer. For we'd be on hand every day to help him. And how lovely if we could bring back the newspaper's old-time glories! That sure was a pleasing thought. It would be his just reward, as you might say, for helping us.

Working the town for subscriptions on Monday and Tuesday, a much more important job just then than news gathering (which isn't saying, though, that I didn't jot down a few

interesting items now and then, chief among them the account of a chicken-thief's arrest and hearing), we held a meeting Tuesday night in the newspaper office. Peg outlined the work that had been done. But when he turned in the subscription money there was a dead silence. Only six dollars and forty-five cents! And we had expected at least five hundred dollars!

Old Cassibaum, who had been moving about in the shadowy background like a forsaken spirit, made a queer sound in his hairy throat. And my heart going out to him, I think I would have cheerfully separated myself from a year of my life just then if I could have added another five hundred dollars to that skimpy money pile on his battered desk. He probably had been doubtful at first, because of our youth and inexperience. But our enthusiasm had won him over. And now, all we had to offer him was six dollars and forty-five cents! No wonder we sat there in dead silence, disappointment showing on our faces.

"Not so 'ot, 'uh?" Rory finally found his voice.

Nor had Scoop, as advertising manager, been any more successful.

"I called on every merchant in town," he reported. "But all I got was a one-inch boloney advertisement from Swineburn's meat market."

"How about your own dad?" I spoke up.

"He's like all the rest of the business men, Jerry. He thinks the *Times* is a fizzle."

"Of course, it's a fizzle," admitted Red. "But, man alive, it isn't going to be a fizzle very long. That's what we're here for—to get it back on its feet."

"Which is exactly what I told Pa," Scoop waggled. "We were going to make a new sheet of the old newspaper, I said. But like the other merchants he seemed doubtful. However, if we did succeed, he said, he'd try and give us some business later on. The trouble is that no one wants to help us get started."

And still old Cassibaum, seemingly more stooped and hawk-like than ever, burdened with his failures, moved back and forth in the shadows.

"Say, Mr. Kepp," Red flagged the restless printer, "how much would it cost to get out a four-page edition of one thousand copies?"

"I probably could do it for one hundred dollars," was the old man's reflective reply.

"One hundred dollars," Red considered the amount. Then he turned to Peg. "How many Scouts have you got on your staff?"

"Fifty-six."

"Approximately two dollars apiece, huh?"

"Aw, heck!" growled one of the younger Scouts, kind of drawing back. "You needn't ask me to cough up two dollars."

"Nor me, either," grumbled another.

"You must think we're made of money," said a third.

"Let's see who *is* willing to contribute," Red held up his own hand.

I counted sixteen hands.

"I—I think we had better dismiss the whole matter," old Cassibaum spoke up in a weary voice. "Like you boys I had cherished certain hopes. And I shall forever feel grateful to you for your attempted help. But I'm convinced now that our efforts are useless. The *Times* must die."

"Like so much mud," steamed Red, matching his words with a determined look. Good old kid! It is in moments like this that I like him best. And he knew, all right, what I meant when I took his hand and squeezed it. "The merchants doubt that we'll put the thing over," he went on. "But they'll patronize us if we do. As for the subscribers, we needn't worry about them if we print the right kind of stuff in our newspaper. . . . Come on, gang," he urged. "What's two dollars? Don't you want to see that totem pole go up in the public square? And don't you want to help this nice old man?"

"No," the printer put in quickly. "I insist on you dropping the matter. I—I can't accept charity from mere boys."

"Charity, your granny," said Red. "This is a business proposition. To help ourselves

we've got to help you, and that's all there is to it. . . . Well, gang, how about it?"

"Nothin' doin'," one of the Scouts expressed the attitude of the majority. "We don't have as much spending money as you do."

"I suppose I *could* get the money if I wrote to my Uncle Don," Red considered. "For he buys me everything I ask for."

"No, no," old Cassibaum spoke with added distress. "You must not. I beg of you to drop the matter."

I saw why Red wanted to get out a special issue. Once the Tutter people had seen a sample of our work they'd be more willing to subscribe. And the subscribers, of course, would bring in the advertisers.

The Scouts began to clean out for home, the front door opening and closing on them in quick succession. They were afraid, I guess, that we were going to rob them. And pretty soon there was nobody left in the building except its still uneasy owner and our own gang.

Ting-a-ling-a-ling-a-ling! went the telephone. And being the nearest to it Red at once answered it.

"Hello!" he spoke into the mouthpiece, having dropped into the revolving chair behind the rickety editorial desk. "Yes, this is the *Tutter Times*. What's that? You want to rent it? Did you say *rent* it? Well, just hold the line and I'll ask Mr. Kepp."

"Who is it?" the hovering printer inquired eagerly.

"Mr. Kasper Bollan, the jeweler on Grant Street. Thinks you're about to give up the newspaper, I guess. And he wants to know if he can rent it for a day."

The printer was staring now, a peculiar, hairy-like figure in the dim lamplight.

"Rent it for a *day?*" he repeated.

"That's what he said."

"How extraordinary!" the speaker showed added bewilderment. "I never heard of anybody renting a newspaper for a week or a month, let alone a day. . . . Are you sure it isn't some trickster?"

"It's old Kasper, all right," Red waggled. "For I recognized his voice. Seemed kind of excited, too. Shall I tell him to come over?"

"But there must be some mistake," the printer struggled with his jumbled wits. "For why should he want to rent the *Times* for a day?"

"Hello!" Red again spoke into the mouthpiece. "I suppose you realize, Mr. Bollan," he made himself sound businesslike, "that your request is—ah—considerably out of the ordinary. It would be a big inconvenience to us. So— What's that? *What?* Please say that again." There was a short silence. "Just a minute: I want to ring up seven new subscriptions on the cash register."

Then, sort of staggering to his feet, the new editor fell limply into my arms.

"Quick!" he breathed. "Pour a cup of cold water on me before I faint."

I shook him.

"What happened?" I cried, the others sharing my excitement.

"Believe it or not," said he, with a kind of wild look in his eyes, "but old Kasper says if we'll rent him the newspaper for a day, and ask no questions, he'll pay us a thousand dollars."

A thousand dollars! A gift from heaven, as you might say.

I grabbed the receiver, intending to cinch the business then and there. But the other end of the line was dead.

"And you're sure it wasn't your imagination?" I turned to Red, who still had a dizzy look on his face.

"*Imagination?*" he squawked. "Suffering cats! Don't you suppose that I know what a thousand dollars sounds like when I hear it?"

Glancing up, my attention drawn to the printer by another peculiar throat sound, I surprised him with a look on his face I can't describe.

"A thousand dollars!" he mumbled, rubbing his hands. "A thousand dollars!"

Then I sort of held my breath, and the others with me, as the printer tiptoed to the front

door and admitted a short, squat, round-faced man, who evidently had come here in very much of a hurry, for he was puffing like a leaky bellows.

It was old Kasper himself!

Somehow, as I recalled the sort of crafty, desperate look on the printer's hawk-like face, and the jeweler's unexpected amazing offer, I had the bewildered feeling that something was going to drop.

CHAPTER III

THE THOUSAND-DOLLAR ISSUE

Wooden Indians, I guess, are a thing of the past in big cities like Chicago and New York. But we still have one in Tutter, where the business men are more easy-going in their methods. Strangely, though, instead of advertising a tobacco shop, as was the original purpose of these Indians, the one I refer to stands in front of a jewelry store on Grant Street. Every morning its waddling, middle-aged owner lugs it into the street, to its accustomed place on the broad sidewalk; and every night, at closing time, he returns it to cover. He has done this for years. And having become accustomed to the peculiar practice, and the misfit Indian itself, the Tutter people have ceased to wonder about it.

You're going to hear a lot about this wooden Indian later on in my story, as it has an important bearing on the mystery that developed. So it will be a good plan, I think, to make a drawing of the Indian, so that you'll know exactly what it looks like. Here it is:

Built on wheels, you can imagine what would

have happened to old Rain-in-the-face, as we call him, on Hallowe'en, if the watchful owner, Mr. Kasper Bollan, had left the figure outside. But it was the only "wife" he had! So, as I say, he lovingly lugged it into his store each night, the neighbors telling the crazy story that he even took it to bed with him. As a matter of fact no one to my knowledge ever saw the Indian after it was once taken inside. For its owner kept his shades drawn, both in the store and connecting living rooms. Which isn't surprising. For the story goes that he owns gems worth a king's ransom, or whatever you call it. Naturally a man like that would try to avoid attention.

Quite often the gem merchants in the cities consult him about their contemplated pur-

chases. For it's generally acknowledged that he's an authority in his line. Which explains his frequent disappearances. Nor is he seldom seen going and coming. Once he rode all the way from Chicago in a guarded taxicab. The understanding neighbors knew then that another gem of rare worth had been added to his already priceless collection.

Short and squat, as I say, he wears a close-fitting black skullcap which, coupled with his stooped shoulders, makes him seem even shorter than he really is. There's nothing very striking about his looks. Nor do the old-fashioned steel-rimmed spectacles that he wears on his shiny nose improve his appearance. As for the black eyes behind these spectacles, very sharp indeed are they at all times—almost too sharp, many of the Tutter people think.

Scoop, as advertising manager, had called on the jeweler earlier in the day, hopeful of getting some business. So the man knew of the changes that had taken place in the newspaper office. I had a hunch, though, as he kind of looked us over, following his entrance, that he wished we were home in bed. For he wasn't used to dealing with boys.

"I came through the alley," he told us, short-winded, gratefully accepting the chair that we offered. "It's shorter."

We waited for him to get his breath.

"Well," he said at length, looking around, "what can you do for me?"

"Tell us first," said Red, as spokesman, "what you want us to do for you."

But the visitor held back.

"Are these boys actually in charge here?" he turned to the proprietor.

"Sure thing," Red cut the hovering, eager-acting printer off. "This fellow," the visitor's attention was drawn to Scoop, "is our advertising manager. This little runt is our make-up man and that big guy is a pressman. Jerry is the official reporter. And I'm the Editor-in-Chief."

"But *I* still own the newspaper," old Cassibaum put in hastily, with a kind of hungry look on his hawk-like face. "So all checks," he greedily worked his gnarled hands, "should be made out to me."

Which was perfectly all right, of course. But he needn't have acted as though he was liable to get gyped. For we weren't that kind.

Red gave him a dig.

"Don't worry. You'll get the money, all right. But before any checks are made out let's hear the particulars."

"And you're sure," the jeweler further hesitated, eying us uneasily, "that I can trust to your discretion?"

"Oh, yes!" old Cassibaum again put in,

afraid, I guess, that the coveted thousand dollars would get away from him. "I'll vouch for the boys, Mr. Bollan. Yes, indeed. You can trust them implicitly."

"Um . . ." grunted the jeweler. "Boys have boys' tongues."

"But these are unusual boys, Mr. Bollan."

"You seem willing enough yourself, Kepp," the jeweler made good use of his crafty eyes.

"Oh, yes! Yes, indeed!" the printer rubbed his hands. "We'll take care of you, Mr. Bollan. We'll be very glad to do that."

"Maybe I'm paying you too much. Still, I don't know of anyone else I could go to. I probably wouldn't have thought of coming to you if I hadn't heard that you're on your last legs. And afraid that this inexperienced boy might turn me down over the telephone, I hurried here to talk with you in person. It's a matter involving the greatest secrecy, Kepp. I want that understood from the first."

Secrecy! That had a kind of bad sound. For secrecy very often is simply another and more convenient name for hidden trickery. Besides, men of his stamp weren't in the habit of throwing small fortunes away. A thousand dollars! Certainly, that seemed like a small fortune to me.

Then were we ever thunderstruck when he told us, sort of blunt-like, shoving it at us with-

out any warning whatsoever, that he had made up his mind to die.

"I spoke of renting your newspaper for a day. But what I really want you to do," he explained, as we stared at him open-mouthed, "is to write up a fancy account of my death. The more flowery you make it the better I'll like it. When you have it ready I'll read it over for possible corrections. Probably we better make it a private funeral. More exclusive, and so on. Whatever you do, though," he grimaced, "lay off the black-hearse stuff. For I hate black. Gray will be more suitable. Put in lots of calla lilies, too, in different designs (wreaths, sprays and possibly a 'Gates Ajar' piece or a 'Broken Wheel'), to make it appear that my untimely passing was regarded by the community as a great loss. And have the funeral just as soon as possible, for that old jane's liable to swoop down on me at any moment, fool that I was," he wound up sourly, "to let her get her clutches on me."

Red's eyes were as big as saucers.

"*Good*-night nurse!" he squawked, when the jeweler finally ran down. "What are you going to do?—commit suicide right here in our office?"

Scoop stepped forward, raising his hand.

"I think I understand," said he, favored by his quick wits. "You just want to pretend that

you're dead," he spoke directly to the jeweler.

The latter's round face brightened.

"That's it exactly," he nodded briskly.

There was a short silence.

"We can do it," Scoop assured gravely, sort of searching the sharp eyes behind the steel-rimmed spectacles. "But before making any definite promises, suppose you tell us *why* you want us to do it."

"And you're quite sure," the jeweler showed further uneasiness, "that I can trust you with my secret?"

"Anything goes with us," assured Scoop, "except a felony."

Which brought a gay laugh from the visitor.

"Oh," he gestured, "get that thought out of your mind. For I'm no criminal. However, as I say, I *am* a big fool. Or, rather, I've let a designing woman make a fool of me. And it is to escape her clutches that I find it necessary now to fake my own death. Either I've got to do that or skin out. And if I leave it will play hob with my business."

He then told us the whole crazy story. On one of his trips to Chicago, he said, he had met a dashing widow by the name of Mrs. Bella Wise. And according to his account of the lady and her "taking" ways, she was just as wise as she was named. When he got his senses back, so to speak, she had skinned him out of two gems worth several thousand dollars

apiece. And quite as bad for him, he had written letters to her that she now threatened to use against him in a breach-of-promise case. Afraid that she would ruin him financially—or, even worse, would force him to marry her—he had thought up this crazy "funeral" scheme of his. All he wanted, he said, was one copy of the newspaper containing the account of his "burial." This was to be sent to her, together with a lock of his hair, by a "friend." If the scheme worked, and he further succeeded in dodging her for a couple of months, it was very probable, he told us in conclusion, that she would marry someone else. Then, of course, he'd be all hunky-dory.

If left to ourselves we would have said "no" on the spot. For good newspaper men don't stoop to stuff like that. Not that any particular harm would have resulted from the publication of the suggested article. In fact, considering the type of woman involved, the tricky scheme was kind of justified. But, even so, it wasn't good business.

Red expressed my sentiments when he started for the door.

"If that's the kind of a newspaper you're going to run," he told old Cassibaum, who was feverishly taking down dates from the beaming visitor, and other data, "you can have it all to yourself."

The printer stiffened.

"It's perfectly legitimate business," he declared, with flashing eyes.

"So is murder," Red shoved back at him. "Come on, gang. Let's go outside and breathe some clean air."

But the leader called us back.

"I think we ought to lend a hand to this job," he gave us a broad wink. "It's kind of tricky, of course. But if Mr. Kepp, experienced newspaper man that he is, says it's all right, that suits me."

"Me, too," nodded Peg, who, like the rest of us, has unlimited confidence in our clever leader.

"Fine!" old Cassibaum beamed at us. "The preparation of the article, for which I have the necessary notes, and the printing of the newspaper, will be good training for you young aspirants."

"Sure thing," nodded Scoop. "And now that we fully agree on that point, suppose we get to work right away."

"That's the way to talk," approved the pleased jeweler. "The sooner you complete the job the quicker you'll get your pay. And you certainly can't put on any too much speed to suit me."

With things coming his way he was as pleased as a kid with an all-day sucker, very much of a contrast, as you can imagine, to his earlier manner.

"A thousand dollars!" old Cassibaum rubbed his hairy hands. "A thousand dollars!"

And I had told myself what a nice old gentleman he was, and how deserving of help! I certainly had been fooled, all right. He was an old miser. If paid the price he probably would have stooped to any kind of dirty newspaper work. I would be glad, I told myself, disliking him more every minute, when we were through with him.

And now the leader had dragged *us* into the shady scheme! I wondered what his motive was, the more so when he shoved old Cassibaum's notes at me and told me to get to work.

"But I don't like it," I told him, when he and I were closeted in the stuffy editorial office, with its battered typewriter and other worn fixtures.

"Don't be a goof, Jerry," he whispered hastily in my ear. "That old geezer has a hidden scheme up his sleeve. I'm as sure of it as I am that you've got ears. *Him* pay out a thousand dollars to get rid of a woman?" the words were spoken scornfully. "Shucks! He's too tight to get acquainted with that kind of a woman in the first place. I saw all kinds of holes in his story."

Talk like that makes me dizzy.

"But what am I to do?" I inquired helplessly.

"Fall in with his idea, of course. If he

wants to die and be buried in a gray casket smothered with calla lilies, for heaven's sake bury him in a gray casket. He's paying the bill. And all the time, as Juvenile Jupiter Detectives, we'll keep a wary eye on him. You see?"

Scoop is a smart leader, as I say. So I didn't argue with him. Instead I threaded a piece of paper into the wabbly typewriter and got to work.

Writing funeral notices was new stuff to me. But I went at it with a will. And having been told by the "deceased" himself to make it nice and flowery I put in a number of little touches that usually aren't found in ordinary obituaries. In the meantime old Cassibaum got busy in the outer room with his ancient typesetting machine, setting up the stuff as fast as I wrote it. Do you know what "boiler plate" is? We didn't until the busy printer, who hummed a sort of mournful tune as he hobbled briskly here and there, showed us some of the stuff, explaining its purpose. It is stuff that printers buy, already set up. In newspapers like this one it is used largely for column "fillers." But we picked out enough of it to make up a whole four-page newspaper, with the exception of my own article, which was featured on the front page with a big black heading, "Gone but not forgotten." Mother called up at eleven o'clock, asking me why I didn't come home.

But I told her that I couldn't leave now, for we were getting out a special issue of the *Times*. She thought, of course, that it had something to do with totem poles. Had she known the truth I dare say she would have yanked me home in a jiffy. As it was I was given permission to stay and finish the job.

In three hours the job was done. And getting his single copy, the jeweler shelled out fifty new twenty-dollar bills. After which, unable to proceed farther with our intended detective work that night, we lit out for our separate homes, the leader having told us to meet at the newspaper office the first thing in the morning.

Little did I dream, though, as I tumbled wearily into bed, wondering if we had done the right thing after all—for if there's anything I hate it's trickery—how soon and under what exciting circumstances I'd again see the dingy black press on which the solitary issue, as sold to the jeweler at such a high price, had been printed.

A thousand-dollar newspaper! I could still see the hawk-faced printer as he clutched the big roll of bills with trembling hands—regular monkey hands!—his eyes burning in their sockets. There was something in the picture that frightened me. And again I told myself, as I stirred restlessly, that I'd be glad when we were through with him.

CHAPTER IV

A HASTY FLIGHT

Dad woke me up at two-thirty.

"Get up, Jerry," he shook me.

I blinked at him, too stupid at first to use my tongue. For was I ever sleepy! Oh-h-h-h, baby!

"Get up quick," he shook me again. "Scoop wants you on the telephone. He says it's important."

Mother appeared in the doorway, wrapped in a gaudy kimono.

"The poor child!" she sympathized with me, sleepy herself. "Why don't you let him rest? For he never got to bed till after midnight."

"Sure thing," I relaxed, sort of contented-like. "Go away and let me sleep."

I guess you know how I felt. For there's nothing that puts more misery into a fellow than to be jerked out of his sleep on the heels of a long, tiresome day.

Dad willingly tucked the sheet under my chin.

"All right, Jerry," said he, starting for the door. "You're the boss."

I sat up then.

"What was it?" I inquired, better able now, as the back part of my brain woke up, to understand what was going on. "Did you say Scoop called me?"

"He's waiting on the telephone."

At two-thirty in the morning!

I was out of bed in a jiffy. And in another jiffy, or even less, I was halfway down the carpeted stairs. For I had sense enough to realize, however dulled my wits were for want of sleep, that the leader never would have called me up at this crazy hour if he didn't need me. I thought, scattered-like, of the jeweler's silly, unbelievable story and the thousand-dollar newspaper that had been printed to his order. I thought, too, of those burning, grasping eyes of old Cassibaum's. And I couldn't get to the telephone fast enough.

"For the love of mud," grumbled Scoop, when I excitedly spoke his name over the wire. "Where do you sleep?—in the next county?"

"You're lucky," I yawned, "to get me up at all. Where are you, anyway?"

"Down town in the *Times* office."

"But I thought you went home," I pressed on my numbed wits.

"I did. But Bill Hadley got me out of bed at two o'clock, having heard, I guess, that I'm the newspaper's new advertising manager."

Bill Hadley is the town marshal. Big and

gruff, a regular bully when it comes to handling lawbreakers, we had bumped into him before in our detective work, as mentioned in the preceding books of this series. Ordinarily we get along with him swell. But he gets sore as heck if we hold back truck on him. Though he probably never would admit it, it's my opinion that he's jealous of us. And lately he had been acting kind of uppish, peeved, I guess, because of what had happened that eerie night in the swamp at Pirates Bend when I touched off the flashlight powder while Poppy Ott worked the camera, as written down in my recent "Prancing Pancake" book. Being older at the game, and much more experienced than us, Bill thought he was putting over a good one on us that memorable night. But all he got for his trouble was a pair of wet feet.

And now, a murder or some similar crime having been committed at the *Times* office, he evidently was in charge there.

"No," Scoop cut me off, when I sought to question him. "I can't tell you about it over the telephone. Too many ears along the line, Jerry. It isn't murder, though, if that's what's on your mind. The thing for you to do is to jerk Red out of bed and get down here as soon as possible. Pick up Rory, too, if you can. In the meantime I'll get in touch with Peg."

Mother almost set her foot down when I raced upstairs to dress. For she didn't like the

idea of me scooting around town at that time of night. But she gave in, though reluctantly, when I told her that Scoop needed me. For she realized that chums owe a duty to one another.

Dad followed me to the front door, where I stopped to tuck in my shirt tail.

"I'll be kind of uneasy," he told me gravely, "until you call up and tell me what's wrong down there."

And maybe you think *I* wasn't uneasy, too! Boy, did I ever stretch my lanky legs across lots to Red's house, so eager was I to join the leader and get his story. It seemed ages before I got the freckled one out of bed. Then we headed for Rory's house, where, luckily, we found him sleeping in a tent.

Have you been abroad in your own streets at two-thirty in the morning? That's an eerie hour, let me tell you, if you don't already know it. There's a stillness in the air that makes you think of tombs. And the darkness, as it pricks your backbone, icicle-fashion, is like a heavy, damp blanket.

Earlier we had complained of the oppressive heat. But now we had goose pimples on us as big as hickory nuts. Nor did we do much talking. For every time we tried it our teeth started chattering. It was the excitement, I guess.

Stepping on one of his own flying shoe

strings Red took a header into the gutter when we turned the corner of Hill Street. Then, turning another corner into Canal Street, we saw Bill Hadley's old flivver standing in front of the lighted printing office.

Scoop came running to meet us.

"Keep mum about that special issue," he whispered, hurrying to get the words in ahead of the marshal's heavy-footed appearance.

"Well, well!" rumbled Bill, when he got his eyes on us. "All ready fur business, heh?"

He was referring to our detective work.

"Is it true," he then questioned Red, "that the ol' man who owns this j'int put you in charge of his affairs?"

Scoop made signs over the marshal's shoulder.

"He told me," said Red, with his eye on the leader, "that we could run the newspaper."

"An' is that what kep' you here t'-night till twelve o'clock?"

"Sure thing," Red spoke with safety, having gotten another signal.

"Um. . . . I don't s'pose you know what happened here after you left."

"No," came eagerly.

"Wa-al," Bill spit, "you're goin' to have plenty of opportunity to try out your newspaper talents. Fur it's entirely up to you b'ys now."

Which sounded like the old man was dead!

"But you haven't told us what happened," Red reminded, kind of frightened-like.

"Humph! I've bin suspicious fur a long time that the old guy was cuckoo. Them eyes of his'n showed it. An' I shore got the goods on him t'-night. Fur I ketched him tossin' ol' newspapers on people's porches. At one-thirty in the mornin', mind you. An' when I tackled him about it he tol' me that he was Cleopatra. After which I very sensibly took him over to the calaboose an' locked him up."

Scoop came in then.

"And having been told that we're the old man's partners," the story was picked up, the speaker, of course, as sorry as we were over the printer's unhappy breakdown, "the marshal wants us to take charge of things here until other arrangements are made."

"I've bin told," Bill added, with further reference to the prisoner, "that he's got a sister somewhar. 'Way up in s'ciety, too, I hear. So, if you fellers want to do some detective work, go through his papers an' see if you kind find her address. Then send her a wire an' find out if she wants to take keer of him. In the meantime I think I'll shoot him over to the county infirmary. Fur his health might break down if I kep' him in a cell. An' so fur as I kin see he's perfectly harmless."

Peg tumbled in then, half-dressed, and the case having been turned over to us, as mentioned, we went into the stuffy editorial room and closed the door, Bill driving away in the direction of home.

"Thank goodness!" Scoop staggered weakly, clutching his head.

Then he pulled himself together.

"I was scared to death," he told us, when Peg had been fully posted on the situation, "that one of you fellows would ask about those 'old' newspapers. And if you had—*good* night! For what do you suppose that old goof did?"

He meant Mr. Kepp.

"What?" we chorused, eager to get the details.

"Come here," the leader beckoned. "I want to show you something." He took us over to the silent press on which the thousand-dollar issue had just been printed. "Do you see that?" he pointed to a little jigger that counted the machine's completed impressions. "It registered an even two hundred thousand when we left here. For I watched the nines turn up when he printed that solitary issue. And now look at it! Don't you see what happened, fellows? Left alone, his mind completely broke down. And with newspapers on the brain, so to speak, he printed another seven hundred copies of the form on the press. And then, in continued cuckoo stuff, he peddled these crazy

newspapers all over town. Here's the bunch that he dropped in our neighborhood when Bill collared him. And I've got the one he left on our front porch. But there's over three hundred more scattered throughout town. And if we don't get them, and burn them up, you can readily see what a pickle old Kasper will be in. The living dead man! We may get into trouble, too. So now you know why I got you out of bed. We've got to cover the whole town before daybreak. Every one of those crazy newspapers has got to be accounted for. So peek under people's front doors, if necessary. And if you see anything inside that looks like a newspaper get the owner out of bed, explaining to him that the paper was delivered to him by mistake. If he tries to hang onto it grab it and run."

Following this advice, in part, Red later got a Beech Street woman out of bed. But what he had mistaken for a newspaper on the inside hall floor turned out to be a sleeping cat, of which there were dozens of others it seems in the untidy house.

"I've always heard," he wound up, when we compared notes at daybreak, having returned to the newspaper office for that purpose, "that women are fond of cats. But honest, fellows, I never dreamed that anybody, even an old maid, would care to own a mess of cats like that. Cats on chairs, cats in the windows and cats

everywhere. I even saw one draped around the sugar bowl on the dining-room table. And when the owner finally opened the front door, after getting the history of my life, for her protection, she had seven more cats in her arms."

"I know her," laughed Scoop. "Her name is Miss Piny Poole. And she lives near the old glue factory."

"Sure thing," nodded Red. "That's the place."

In checking up we found that we were sixty papers short. Yet we had faithfully and conscientiously covered the whole town, even the outskirts. There was nothing more that we could do. And convinced now that the dizzy printer had dropped the unrecovered copies into the mail, for possible out-of-town subscribers, we locked up the print shop and hurried around the corner to Grant Street, where we beat a sharp rat-a-tat-tat on the jeweler's front door.

It was fast getting daylight. We could hear a milkman in an adjoining block as he ran from house to house, his bottles rattling in their wire containers. And an occasional car passed the corner, rumbling across the canal bridge.

Told who was at the door, the startled jeweler turned the key and admitted us. To our surprise he was fully dressed. And even before we had told him of the predicament that he was

in, through no fault of ours, he seemed strangely frightened. I remembered it afterwards when, to clear up the mystery that developed, we attempted to piece things together in proper detective style.

Locking us in, and breathing hard, the owner cautiously raised one of the drawn shades, asking us in a throaty whisper, as he peered up and down the street, if we had seen anyone near his place. A milkman had just passed, we said, wondering at his actions.

"And you're sure," he spoke with mounting agitation, "that you saw no one near here wearing heavy green goggles?"

We shook our heads. And put wise then to what had happened at the print shop after he had left with his solitary copy of the special issue, and made to thoroughly understand the crazy mess that he was in, the jeweler fell into a chair completely flabbergasted.

"We picked up all of the newspapers in town," Scoop told him. "But very probably there's others in the mail. So you'd better prepare yourself for a jolt, as sooner or later one of those copies is bound to get into Mrs. Pangborn's hands. And using it as a club, to drive us out of business and otherwise gain her ends, she'll spread it all over her front page. 'Gone but not forgotten!' You'll wish, all right, that you were forgotten before she gets through ridiculing you through us. For

she's that kind of a woman. Her way is the only way."

"Good heavens!" the jeweler cried, his horrified eyes sticking out of his round face like peeled onions. And serious as the situation was for him I almost had to smile. For he surely looked funny, stubbed, moon-faced, shiny-nosed geezer that he was. "What can I do?" he cried helplessly. "What can I do?"

"I'm not sure that we can help you," said Scoop, eying him narrowly. "But if you'll tell us the truth we'll try."

"Tell you the truth?" the speaker stared. "What do you mean?"

"You ought to realize, Mr. Bollan," Scoop spoke bluntly, "that we never swallowed that 'Mrs. Wise' stuff that you dished out to us in the print shop. We know that you had a hidden motive in faking your death."

The jeweler choked, the blood rushing to his face.

"But it's true!" he cried, flourishing his arms. "It's true, I tell you." He was in a perfect frenzy now. "She has my letters! She'll make me marry her! I can't escape her! Oh, what a mess! And you boys are to blame," he turned on us with blazing eyes. "For you should have watched that old fool. You might have known that something like this would happen. Oh, oh, oh!" he wailed, pushing aside

his skullcap and clawing his bald head. "I see nothing but ruin ahead."

Scoop, as he caught my eye, looked kind of silly. For he saw now, in direct opposition to his quickly picked off theory, that the frenzied old flirt was actually telling us the truth. He really had a woman chasing after him.

It made me sick.

"I know!" the jeweler then came to a sudden panting decision. "I'll run away and hide. Then no one can say I'm not dead. Yes," a cunning look came into his cat-like eyes, "that's what I'll do. And I'll go right away before the town is astir." He looked around. "My shop is safe as it is. That needn't deter me." He stopped in front of the wooden Indian that I have mentioned, as it stood on its small iron wheels just within the front door. "But I better get rid of this. You boys can have it," he spoke in quick generosity. "For it's not unlike that totem pole that you're interested in. I'll put it outside for you. There! Now I'll lock this door and escape through the back one. It may be months before you see me again. Help me all you can. And the Indian will be your pay."

Click! went the key in the lock. Then, after a short silence, in which we stood in the street staring at one another sort of blank-like, the back door gently opened and closed. A cloaked

figure came into sight in the alley, soon disappearing around a corner.

Red was crazy over the Indian. So we helped him drag it home, where it was given a place of honor in the parlor. But when Aunt Pansy got up she promptly banished it to the barn, calling it names that might have brought the whole red-skinned race down on top of her with sharpened tomahawks if the stoical wooden face had been able to talk.

Nor did we suspect, as we covered the unusual gift with an old rug to keep the chickens from roosting on it, that that same copper-colored, stoical face concealed a most amazing mystery.

CHAPTER V

THE ARRIVAL OF SITTING BULL

"THANKS," Dad said dryly, when I slid into my usual place at the breakfast table.

"What for?" I grinned, sort of thinking to myself, as I looked at him over the spoon holder, that it sure was a lucky day for me when Mother married him. For he's the swellest dad who ever walked on two legs.

"For relieving my anxiety last night, as requested," he matched my grin with one of his own.

Gosh! I *had* promised to call him up from the *Times* office. But in the rush of chasing around after those old newspapers, and everything, I had forgotten all about it. Still, as I could tell by his jolly manner, he didn't hold it against me. That's the finest thing of all about Dad. He never holds anything against me. If I make a mistake (and what boy doesn't?) he simply passes it over, confident, I guess, that I'll do better next time.

And certainly, I told myself now, sorry that I had let Scoop drag me into that crazy newspaper deal, there would be no "next time," so

far as I was concerned, if a similar proposition was shoved at me. I guess not! And it further worried me, as I liberally buttered my toast, to think that we would have to keep mum about the matter, even covering up if necessary.

Learning then that old Mr. Kepp had been taken away to the crazy house, which explained Scoop's emergency call, Mother seemed surprised when I further told her that my chums and I were going to run the newspaper.

"If you boys don't get yourselves into hot water," said she, kind of fretting-like, "I'll miss my guess. And I think your father ought to satisfy himself that we aren't liable for your debts."

Boy, if she only knew it, I kind of squirmed inside, we were in hot water already!

"Which one of you fellows is going to be the editor?" Dad then inquired, with genuine interest, when I told him that there were five of us in the deal.

"Red," I informed, stowing the cornflakes away.

"Good heavens!" Mother threw up her hands. "It will be *some* newspaper if you trust to his judgment. For the only thing he ever made a mark at is eating."

"I'm the chief reporter," I further informed, with a touch of pride, "and Scoop's the advertising manager."

"Which leaves Peg and Rory to do the print-

ing, huh?" Dad grinned, in quick comprehension of the five-cornered partnership.

I nodded.

"And do you think that you can make it pay?" Mother quizzed.

"We have a motive," I told her, attending to my food.

She saw what I meant.

"Now that your father and I have a sort of family interest in the revived *Times*," said she, "I suppose we ought to lend you our support. But you'll have to leave me out of it, Jerry. For, as I've told you before, I fully agree with Mrs. Pangborn that it would be a civic mistake to erect that unsightly totem pole in the public square."

"They have one in Milwaukee," I told her stiffly. "And Mr. Ott says they have one in Seattle, too."

"*Mr.* Ott!" she kind of turned up her nose, as she briskly stirred her coffee.

And he was my chum's father, too! It made me hot.

"*Mrs.* Pangborn!" I mimicked her, stirring just as briskly.

"Tut-tut!" grinned Dad. "Please refrain from pegging the family crockery at each other."

"Time will tell," said Mother, sort of superior-like.

"The *Times* will," was my pointed reply.

Just because we were the youngest, and had to mind, she and her clique thought that they had us licked. But we'd show them! Anyway, as I could tell from the look on Dad's face, I had one stanch supporter in the family.

I had talked big about us running the newspaper. And I meant everything I said, too. I was soon to learn, though, that printing is mighty complicated work. The typesetting machine had performed perfectly for old Cassibaum. But when Peg tried his hand at it, while I was out gathering news that morning, it being our intention to run the newspaper as best we could until the paper and ink gave out, the whole keyboard fell apart. Nor could Rory get the press started. We were licked, so to speak, before we had struck the first blow.

That is, things looked pretty blamed unfavorable for us.

But Red wouldn't give up. No, sir-ee! And shaking all of the money out of his savings bank (while Aunt Pansy's broad back was turned!), and calling a repair man from the neighboring town of Ashton, he later paid the bill himself. The man, before leaving with his tools, gave us a lot of valuable pointers. And at his suggestion, to get started, we cut down the size of our newspaper to the Saturday Evening Post size, calling it the *Tutter Bugle,* the little four-page newspaper with a big toot.

In the meantime I had written up an article

about Mrs. Norman Gregory, the rich cattle woman whose big farm, on the edge of town, is one of the show places of the county. She was planning a special exhibit of Jersey calves, she told me, when I called on her. So I headed the article:

COME AND SEE MRS. GREGORY'S CALVES

Which, I thought, was a swell start. And all enthused now over my new job I hurriedly pounded out the rest of the article, Red in the meantime having taken down a classified advertisement over the telephone. Here it is:

WANTED—A scrubbing brush and twenty-seven more cats. Please rush. Miss Piny Poole, 222 Beech Street.

"That's the old girl who lives near the glue factory," he told me, showing me the advertisement, which later was turned over to Peg, now a fairly good typesetter.

"But I thought you told me," I spoke to the freckled one, "that she already had a houseful of cats."

"And how!" he laughed. "But evidently she wants more. . . . What shall I do, Jerry? —send her a bill for the advertisement?"

"That's customary," I nodded.

And here's the article that I wrote about the chicken thief:

Pied Piper of Tutter Is Now Tuning Up in Jail

The melodious strains from Jeff Pratt's mouth organ may have had the same effect on the chickens at the county infirmary that the similar strains blown from the flute of the fabled Pied Piper of Hamlin had upon the rats of the latter village, but Justice of the Peace, Oscar T. Kronen, failed to be moved when the musician was arraigned before the bar of justice on a charge of stealing chickens from the county infirmary.

Admittedly, Jeff is the best mouth-organ player in the world.

"Every time I sit down to play," said Jeff, "a crowd gathers to listen. Folks just naturally love to hear me."

It isn't Jeff's fault—he just can't help being such a good musician.

One day he was walking along the road near the county infirmary, according to his own story, and was playing harmonica selections without paying much attention to anything but his music.

"Imagine my surprise when I looked around, after I had gone about a mile past the infirmary, and saw six chickens following me. When I stopped playing they made an awful rumpus with their loud cackling. Evidently they were trying to tell me they wanted to hear some more music. I started to play and they immediately became quiet and walked along behind me.

"I didn't know who they belonged to. I tried to shoo them back but they kept on trailing me. Finally I picked up a gunny sack and tried to chase them with it. I threw the sack at them—

and what do you suppose those dumb critters did? They crawled right into the sack and went to sleep.

"I was afraid someone might come along in an automobile and run over them, so I picked up the sack, chickens and all, and carried them.

"I didn't know what to do with them, so I went to Zulutown where I gave the chickens to Mrs. Barney Bitts, who, over my protests, insisted upon paying for them.

"That's how this whole affair happened. It just goes to show how an innocent man sometimes gets in wrong. Somebody told me once that if I didn't quit playing the mouth organ I would get into trouble. When I get out of jail I don't want to see another mouth organ."

We were getting along swell. For I picked up other news, too, Scoop in the meantime having argued the butcher-shop proprietor into lengthening his "boloney" advertisement to three column inches. Here is the advertisement as Scoop wrote it:

OH, BOLONEY!

Buy it from us in links or lengths at two bits a pound. Why go elsewhere and be cheated?

Swineburn's Meat Market
616 Main Street

And right under that we had a bakery advertisement that Scoop picked up shortly after dinner. Here it is:

We Specialize in Cakes
Of All Kinds

The home of that delicious Corn-Top bread that the whole town is bragging up.

Kelly's Big Bakery
414 School Street

But the best was yet to come. For that afternoon Scoop, clever kid that he is, picked off a regular old blinger of a scheme. Oh, baby! It sure was the berries, we agreed.

A lot of out-of-town newspapers had been delivered that morning by the mail man. And in one of these—I think it was a Milwaukee newspaper—we read about an automobile driver named Lotwood, who, chained to the steering wheel of his car, was going to try and break his own world's endurance record. He was to have no sleep, the newspaper said, and to better his existing record he had to drive continuously for more than four days and nights, getting his food and gasoline while running.

Which was interesting in itself. But the part that got our eyes, and set our imaginations to working, was the advertisements scattered throughout the newspaper, telling how "Daredevil" Lotwood (for example) was going to use a certain kind of gasoline and wear certain brands of clothing, the particular gasoline and

clothing dealers, of course, paying the advertising bills. Newspapers promote schemes like that to boost their advertising.

And how lucky for us, as Scoop pointed out, if we could copy the scheme and put it on in Tutter. We'd then get news and advertising both. Every issue of ours would be a "scoop," or whatever you call it, on the poky old *Globe*. For, of course, being back of the scheme, Lotwood, if we could induce him to come to town, would give us all the best news, telling how many of Mugger's ham sandwiches he had eaten (Mr. Mugger is one of our restaurant men) and how many gallons of Norton's gasoline he had used—Mr. Norton being another Tutter dealer.

Yes, sir, it was a swell scheme. And eager to get started we sent Lotwood a telegram asking him how much he'd charge to put on his stunt in Tutter. In the meantime, while we were waiting for a favorable reply, Scoop laid out a whole newspaper. One of the advertisements (copied from the Milwaukee paper) read like this:

4 DAYS!——4 NIGHTS!

Shackled to the steering wheel, "Daredevil" Lotwood will drive his automobile for 100 hours without a stop for sleep or rest.

Daisy Dell Milk His Principal Food

Here indeed is a crucial test of stamina, endurance and health. But Lotwood will come

through! He knows the importance proper diet plays in his ordeal and plans his food accordingly. The "Daredevil" has carefully tested Daisy Dell Milk and will depend upon it to build up his strength. Six pints of this pure, pasteurized milk will be included in his daily rations—he will drink nothing else.

Unfailing Service

Lotwood must also have unfailing service. His milk must be delivered promptly when and where he wants it. After investigating our plant and equipment he expressed his satisfaction and confidence in our ability to take care of every requirement.

Daisy Dell Dairy
100 Main Street

Calling on us for help, Scoop worked up other advertisements, too, featuring batteries, lubricating oil, hats, shoes, neckties, ice cream, underwear, tires, watches and fountain pens. With the samples in the newspaper to go by, it was no trick at all. For all we had to do was to describe the truck and tell why Lotwood preferred it.

Then the bottom dropped out of our bucket, so to speak. For Lotwood, in his reply, tried to hold us up for a thousand dollars. Which reminded us, as we gloomily put the telegram aside, that Bill Hadley had made no mention of old Cassibaum's similar fortune. Could it

be, we wondered, that the old man had sewed the twenty-dollar bills into his coat lining?

Earlier, having found his sister's address in a bureau drawer, we had sent her a telegram, as instructed, explaining that her brother's mind had broken down, asking her to let us know by return wire if she would come and get him. Stopping at the newspaper office on the way home to supper, and finding nothing there, we concluded that she didn't care what became of him.

Having made several prolonged observation tours up and down our street, Mrs. Gussie knew what was going on in the *Bugle* office, as I'll now call it. So that night, wanting to be as mean as she could, she came out with a lot more of her wordy blaa-blaa-blaa stuff. But much less than getting excited over it, we were only too thankful that as yet she hadn't found out about the special issue. Gosh! I don't mind telling you that I kind of shivered in my shoes when I opened our copy of the *Globe*. But it was needless alarm.

"It is to be admitted," she spread her gab around on the editorial page, "that we owe a civic duty to our Boy Scouts. For Scouting keeps boys fit, both physically and mentally. But let us not make barbarians of our boys and instill in them barbaric tendencies. Let us, instead, surround them with elevating influences. Let us not be satisfied to see them simply de-

velop into worth-while men; but let us strive to make them men of culture as well. Proper surroundings and proper home influences will do it. There is a vast difference between duty and indulgence. Therefore let us not indulge these misguided sons of ours, however dear they may be to us individually. But let us do our duty as crusaders of culture. Let us be firm. For we are in the right. . . . *Down with the totem pole!*"

We were going to miss old Cassibaum, all right. For Mrs. Gussie had us licked on the editorial stuff. It seemed to roll out of her like hunks of sausage out of a meat grinder. Her stuff had a kind of high-brow sound, too, which favored her purpose. We intended, of course, to do our best. But unless we got help I began to doubt if we'd make much headway.

I got another emergency call from Scoop that evening.

"Don't tell me," said I, when urged to come down to the newspaper office right away, "that you've gone cuckoo, too."

"I'm crazy, all right," he laughed. "If you want to know the truth of the matter I'm crazy with joy. . . . Ever hear of Sitting Bull?"

I thought of the wooden Indian in Red's barn.

"Why did you change its name?" I inquired.

"You're all wet," the leader told me, reading my thoughts. "I'm not talking about an Indian, either wooden or real. I'm talking

about the world's champion pole-sitter. He's here in the office, Jerry. And he says he'll help us out for ten dollars a day and his keep."

"Can he set type?" I inquired eagerly.

"Dumb-bell! He's going to sit on a pole. No, not that totem pole of Mr. Ott's, but a regular flagpole. His best record, he says, is three weeks. And how easy for us, huh, to get out a big issue every night, telling what kind of socks he wears and how often he washes his feet—with Ivory soap, of course! Honest, Jerry, it's going to be a scream."

I caught on now. And in a flash I was just as excited as the leader. Come to think of it I *had* heard about this flagpole geezer before. While putting on his stunt in Baltimore a number of kids had tried to copy him, one of them, a boy named Avon Foreman, staying on his perch for more than ten days.

Hot diggity! The little old *Bugle* sure would have a chance to do some tooting now, I told myself, as I lit out for the newspaper office lickety-cut.

CHAPTER VI

THE PLOT THICKENS

Even before I came within sight of Red's house, on my way to the *Bugle* office, where Scoop was waiting for me, I heard Aunt Pansy's angry voice. She was standing on the front porch, a glass dish clutched tightly in her fat hands, which particular dish, I gathered from her flow of gab, had earlier been filled with choice jello. But Red had gotten home ahead of her. And now the dear little dish was empty!

"You knew very well," stormed the furious guardian, "that I was saving that jello for a committee meeting to-night at Mrs. Pangborn's house."

"Um-yum!" smacked Red, patting his stomach tantalizingly, very careful, though, to keep beyond range of his angry relative's big arms. For what she would have done to him if she could have gotten her itching hands on him! Oh, baby!

"How much was there?" I inquired, kind of envious-like.

"Only two quarts."

He let out his belt.

Only two quarts! But what was the use of razzing him? Anyway, the pleasing thought jumped at me, Mrs. Gussie wouldn't get a crack at the delicacy.

"Good for you," I patted the bloated one on the back.

"Don't thump too hard, Jerry," he hiccoughed, sort of weaving back and forth across the sidewalk.

"The hero!" I further bragged on him.

"I told her that I'd get even with her," he gulped, "when she turned on that nice Indian of mine. The bossy old thing! I'll be glad when Ma gets home."

"When do you expect her?" I inquired.

"Week after next."

His mention of the wooden Indian had set me to thinking.

"I still can't figure out," I said, "why old Kasper got so blamed generous with his pet Indian all of a sudden."

"He thought, I guess, that he ought to pay us something for chasing around after those crazy newspapers. And what reward would better suit a bunch of Boy Scouts than a nice wooden Indian?"

"Just the same," I nodded, "it was a queer gift."

And had I given more rein to my probing thoughts just then I probably would have un-

covered something! But a more important thought to me at the moment was Sitting Bull, who, I quickly explained to Red, as we hurried down the street into which the night shadows were creeping, was going to put on his famous flagpole stunt in Tutter, thus enabling us to carry out the big advertising scheme that we had earlier hoped to build about "Daredevil" Lotwood.

"But why do they call him Sitting Bull?" Red inquired. "Is he a real Indian?"

"Of course not," I informed, remembering what I had read about the flagpole champion in the newspapers. "He had to have some kind of a professional name. So he rechristened himself Sitting Bull. I think it's a good name."

"And how much do we have to pay him?"

"Ten bucks a day."

"Pretty soft for him at that," the freckled one waggled thoughtfully. "For he gets his board and lodging free."

"The only 'lodging' he has," I explained, recalling the pictures that had accompanied the newspaper articles, "is a sort of harness, in which he sits at the top of the pole, and a rubber coat."

"It sounds interesting," said Red. "I wouldn't mind trying it myself."

A number of kids were hanging around the front door of Mugger's restaurant.

"Have you seen him, Jerry?" Tommy Hegan inquired eagerly, when I stopped.

"Who?" I inquired.

"The guy who sits on flagpoles. He's in there eating supper."

Rubbering through the screen door with quickened interest I caught sight of a tall, lanky, hollow-eyed man with an egg-shaped head, who had enough side dishes parked around his plate to feed a Kansas threshing crew.

"Two dollars and forty-five cents," said Mr. Mugger, handing the hard-working customer his bill.

"Um . . ." came the throaty grunt. "A nice little lunch, neighbor. I've enjoyed it. But I'll expect some real meals with extra trimmings when them b'ys at the *Bugle* office start waitin' on me at the foot of my pole. Fur I don't know of anything that puts more pep into a fellow's appetite than pole sittin'. . . . Ever see me in harness, neighbor?"

"No," Mr. Mugger shook his head.

"There was a time," the words were spoken dreamily, as the speaker mopped his cave-like mouth with a paper napkin, "when I pulled down big money, the amusement-park owners biddin' ag'inst each other fur my valued services. People in them days used to bring their dinners an' squat at the foot of my pole, talkin'

to me an' tellin' me the most important news of the day. But since them confounded kids in Baltimore an' St. Louis took to imitatin' me, my art has degenerated. An' here I be, dickerin' with youngsters in knee pants!—too young, even, to raise fuzz on their upper lips! *Me,* a world champion, mind you. . . . Kin I have another cup of coffee, neighbor?"

Mr. Mugger got the coffee himself.

"Then it's really true," he inquired, with a curious look on his face, "that the Ellery boy and his chums have hired you to put on your stunt here?"

A pained expression crossed the old man's weathered face.

"Please don't think me finicky, neighbor, but I don't like to have my work spoken of as a stunt. It's art, sir. An art in which I excel, or, ruther, an art in which I did excel until, as I say, them confounded kids started buttin' in on me. The little jackanapes! An' one of them in Baltimore actually stayed up fur more'n a week, too."

Mr. Mugger couldn't hardly swallow that.

"Hanging to a pole?" he inquired skeptically.

"That's the way *I* do it," the old man showed added pride, as he swigged the coffee down, "but them youngsters all had reg'lar platforms on the top of their poles, fitted up with umbrellas an' waterproof blankets an' soft pil-

lows. Everything but runnin' water an' 'lectric lights. Folderol! An' so the great fortune that might have bin mine—which should have bin mine—has bin swept away by the interference of a parcel of copy-cattin' youngsters. . . . An' you really feel, neighbor, as one who knows the town an' its people, that the b'y I talked with at the newspaper office is reliable?"

"The Ellery boy? Absolutely," the speaker jerked his head. "I think myself that he and his chums have bit off a big chunk. But if anybody can make a go of the newspaper they surely can."

"Someone give it to 'em?" the old man quizzed, kind of stretching his hairy neck.

"No. The original owner went crazy. He's over at the county infirmary, I hear."

"Um. . . . I don't want you to think that I'm imposin' on your good nature, neighbor," a sort of cavernous look now came into the flagpole artist's hollow eyes, "but if you think you *could* spare another cup of that delicious, invigoratin' coffee——"

And he got it, too! After which he arose to his feet, the tallest, lankiest and hungriest-looking man that I ever had set eyes on in all my life.

"Jest charge it to the b'ys," he returned the bill to the proprietor, after which he rolled, like a loaded ship, toward the door.

"You better hurry up and collect some advertising money," I yipped at the leader, when Red and I tumbled into the newspaper office, where the whistling advertising manager was busy pasting pictures into his newspaper layout. "For that walking reservoir of yours has already run up a bill of two dollars and forty-five cents against us."

Scoop looked kind of startled when he got the particulars. But having set the ball to rolling, so to speak, it wasn't his nature to back down.

"Let's not get excited over a single meal check," said he. "For very probably Mr. Mugger will be glad to take his pay in advertising."

Which was a bright idea, all right!

"And you've really hired the old geezer?" I inquired.

A paper was shoved at me.

"Sure thing. There's the contract."

And reading it, I saw, all right, that it was up to us to do the feeding. Still, as the leader said, that would be all right with us if Mr. Mugger would fall for the advertising stuff. And why not? Other restaurant men advertised. And, in a way, our choice of him was a distinction.

So, our spirits undampened, we went ahead with our plans, preparing, among other things, a front-page news item that read like this:

Sitting Bull Climbs Schoolhouse Flagpole for 500-Hour Grind

Hopes to Break His Own World's Record

Get your kodaks, folks! For you'll surely want a picture of this famous world champion, Sitting Bull, the king of his kind, who, having climbed the schoolhouse flagpole to-day at noon, intends to stay there, a prey to the elements and battling exhaustion, for at least 500 hours.

And who brought this champion to town? Who provided this unique entertainment, enabling the Tutter people to enjoy a sight they otherwise might never have seen? Was it the *Globe,* whose editor is trying so hard to get the Tutter Boy Scouts to give up everything that a boy likes, and take up knitting? Oh, no! It was the *Bugle* that brought Sitting Bull to town—the little newspaper with a big toot—the newspaper, further, that knows what boys like and intends to see that the Tutter Boy Scouts get what they want, totem poles included.

You don't have to swallow a dictionary to read our snappy little newspaper. Right is right with us. And we don't try to use a lot of big words to get the innocent reader tangled up so that he won't suspect that his rights are being yanked away from him. The Indians were carving totem poles in this country long before the white race knew there was such a continent. And if a totem pole is the best carving job that these same Indians—the true owners of this country—can do to-day, their work is deserving of respect. And the Tutter fathers

in particular, with Boy Scouts in the family, should make it their duty to see that Mr. Ott's fine totem pole is accorded the respect due it. . . . *The totem pole shall go up!*

I had intended to say a lot more about the flagpole champion, telling how his food would be sent up to him in a pail (or possibly a tub!), and so on. But when I got started on that totem-pole stuff I couldn't stop. Anyway, that was the big issue at hand.

"Good enough!" praised Scoop, when he read my article. "I guess that will make old Gussie back up and shut up."

So it was all arranged now that Sitting Bull was to climb the schoolhouse flagpole the following noon, getting himself fixed at the top of the pole for a long sit.

And here are a few of the advertisements that Scoop worked up, built around the pole-sitting stunt:

21 Days! 21 Nights! 500 Hours!

Strapped to the top of the schoolhouse flagpole, Sitting Bull will stay there, sleeping and eating at the top of the pole, for at least 500 hours.

Daisy Dell Milk His Principal Food

Here indeed is a crucial test of stamina, endurance and health. But Sitting Bull will win out! He knows the importance proper diet plays in his ordeal and plans his food accord-

ingly. The world champion has carefully tested Daisy Dell Milk and will depend upon it to build up his strength. Six quarts (maybe more!) of this pure, pasteurized milk will be included in his daily rations—he will drink nothing else.

Unfailing Service

Sitting Bull must also have unfailing service. His milk must be delivered promptly when he needs it. After investigating our plant and equipment, he expressed his satisfaction and confidence in our ability to take care of every requirement.

Daisy Dell Dairy
100 Main Street

Having worked up the advertisement in the first place to fit Lotwood, it was easy to switch it around to fit Sitting Bull. Here's another:

SITTING BULL SITS LIKE A KING
IN PINK B.V.D.'S

Forced to wear his underwear for three consecutive weeks, Sitting Bull has selected the kind of underwear that will give him service and comfort. Nor does he feel that this lengthy separation from others of his kind justifies anything but the latest in style, color and fashioning. That is why he selected one of our delightful pink patterns—the underwear preferred by young men and men who want to keep young.

Jarlsberg's Clothing House
"On the Bridge"

And how's this one?

SITTING BULL WILL NEVER BE BALD

"What can you do for my hair?" asked the world champion. "It's getting pretty thin. And exposed to the elements as I am in my work I can't afford to lose any more of it."

Sitting Bull's loss of hair is due to the ordinary scalp condition, responsible for most baldness. Our treatments will quickly return his scalp to health and promote a luxuriant growth of new hair.

Let us tell you what we can do for *your* hair. Remember our written guarantee protects you in case we fail.

Thompson
Hair and Scalp Specialist
515 Hill Street

It was Scoop's scheme to print these advertisements in our newspaper, to show the merchants what we could do, and then go around and talk business.

"Even if I do get a few turn-downs," he said, "we'll be nothing out. For we can easily switch names at the bottom of the rejected advertisements, for the second printing, using names of merchants who will be glad to pay for the service."

"But won't it seem funny," I brought up the objection, "if you tell about Sitting Bull climbing the pole in pink underwear and then have him change overnight to some other color?"

Scoop laughed.

"Gosh!" said he. "That would be funny. Anyway," he decided daringly, "I'm going ahead with the job as planned."

So the newspaper was gotten out on Thursday, the regular date of publication. Boy, we sure worked hard that morning! Nor did Sitting Bull, who had slept all night in old Cassibaum's untidy bed, get up and help us. He even kept his door locked. But we didn't try very hard to get him up, for, as Scoop said, if he stayed in bed all morning we'd save the price of a breakfast.

Using a lot of "boiler plate" to complete our forms we went to press at ten-thirty. And maybe you think we didn't swell with pride as that old press creaked and groaned, the numbering machine climbing from two hundred thousand seven hundred to two hundred and one thousand seven hundred, which gave us a thousand copies, all printed and folded. *Our* newspaper! The child of our brain, so to speak! It was a heavenly feeling.

The younger kids were eager to help us. So, when the run was completed at eleven-thirty, we put them to work.

"Remember," Scoop told the volunteer carriers, as they loaded their arms, "leave a paper at each house. Explain that it is a sample copy. And if you get any subscriptions turn them in after dinner."

"Extra!" the kids shouted, hurrying away. "Extra! All about Sitting Bull's pink underwear."

Which reminded us that Sitting Bull himself was still pounding his ear. Nor would he pile out when we banged on the locked door.

"Get up!" cried Scoop. "It's time for you to climb the pole."

But there was no reply. And convinced now that something had happened to the old man, we broke the lock. The bed was empty! And there on the floor lay two twenty-dollars bills, an explanation in themselves of the flagpole sitter's hasty and probably excited flight through the still open window.

So the thousand dollars hadn't been sewed up in Cassibaum's coat lining after all! He had hidden the money in his bed, or some such place. And having found it, old rubber-gut, plainly a crook at heart, had decided to open a flagpole engagement in some other part of the world.

CHAPTER VII

RED SAVES THE DAY

The window through which the greedy thief had wedged himself in his hasty and probably excited get-away gave into an alley. But when we ran outside, hopeful that he had dropped more of the stolen bills in his continued flight, we found nothing more valuable than a dirty handkerchief, though there were marks under the window showing where the suddenly enriched one had landed awkwardly on all fours. Oh, if only we had been there to grab him! Which, though, was a useless thought.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised," said Scoop, when we later talked the matter over in the silent print shop, a careful search of the disorderly bedroom having failed to disclose any further hidden money, "that the old geezer skinned out early last night, probably having found the bills when he got into bed. So it would be useless, I think, to try to overtake him. For he may be halfway to New York City by this time."

Nor could we go to Bill Hadley for help, as the shrewd leader further pointed out to us.

For Bill, of course, would immediately inquire where the supposedly penniless printer had gotten the thousand dollars in the first place—to answer which, truthfully, we'd have to break our promise to old Kasper.

Everything considered, it would be best, we decided, however much it galled us to think of old pig-face living in lazy luxury on the stolen fortune, to let the matter ride for the present, sort of hoping jointly that the scheming jeweler, tiring of his self-enforced exile, would hurry back to town and take his probably deserved medicine. After which, relieved of our present obligation, a police net could be put out for the thief, thus leading to his capture—this, of course, in the event that he hadn't already eaten himself to death.

Nine hundred and sixty dollars! Boy, he sure would stuff himself, all right, with that fortune in his pockets. And unless we got action within the next two weeks there probably would be little of the money left.

"And we could have saved it all," said Red regretfully, "if we'd once thought about it. I'm surprised that we didn't."

"A fellow can't think of everything," grunted Peg. "And if anybody happens to ask you we've done a lot around here as it is."

"Hi'll tell the bloomin' world," sighed Rory, kind of exhausted-like.

Then did we ever set up a chorus of despair-

ing groans when a further remark of the freckled one's switched our thoughts to the empty flagpole, another catastrophe, as you might say, brought about by the champion's unexpected flight. Having been told in our newspaper that the world-famous Sitting Bull and his pink underwear were already on exhibition (for it was now twelve-thirty), the Tutter people, led by the kids, would hasten there to see the promised free show, probably telling each other that it was a godsend to the town that it had at least one progressive newspaper, thus providing the town with popular entertainment.

But what would be their reaction when they found the pole empty? Would they descend on us with blood in their eyes and try to scalp us alive, thinking, of course, that we were a bunch of unprincipled liars, interested only in printing sensational news? And what would those advertisers say? Certainly, was our sinking thought, as we pictured the *Bugle's* downfall, there was no chance now of collecting money from them. We'd be lucky, we told ourselves, with the sweat streaming down our faces, if they didn't sue us, or something. For their advertising, like our editorial stuff, all work of ours, was misleading.

And there was Mrs. Pangborn. How she would gloat over our ruin! "I told you so!" That is what she would dish out to her chosen

clique. *Boys* run a newspaper? It simply couldn't be done. Which further proved the futility of considering boys' opinions in matters of art. Oh, I knew, all right, what kind of a slick line she would hand out. And did the thought of it ever make us miserable!

Then little old redhead saved the day for us.

"I'll do it," he squared his shoulders.

"Do what?" I inquired.

"Take old Sitting Bull's place."

"But what if you fell?"

"Oh, I'll tie myself on."

"Bunk!" grunted Peg, turning away.

"It isn't bunk," flared Red. "I mean it."

Scoop drew a deep breath.

"Boy!" his eyes danced. "It would be wonderful, old kid, if you really could do it. It's our only hope, I guess."

"I've always wanted to do it ever since I heard about those Baltimore kids," said Red. "And now's my chance."

"Haw! haw! haw!" jeered Peg. "I've got a photograph of you climbing that pole and staying there all night."

"There's nothing to be afraid of."

"You'd soon change your mind when the bats started picking the pimples off the end of your nose. Besides, even if you had the nerve to do it your folks wouldn't let you."

"How can they stop me when they're a thousand miles from here?"

Old hefty hadn't thought of that.

"Anyway," was his rejoinder, "your Aunt Pansy is still on the job."

"And 'ow," laughed Rory.

"She went to Chicago this morning on business. And I'd like to see her make me come down," the speaker added cockily, "if I once got up there."

Peg couldn't make himself believe that the freckled one was in earnest.

"What if your aunt tried starving you?" he grinned broadly.

"Or sent Mr. 'Adley up the pole after you?" supplemented Rory.

"Don't make me laugh," Red acted big, very well pleased, of course, with the attention that he was getting. "Bill couldn't climb to the top of that pole with a block and tackle."

Peg knows how to be blunt.

"No," he grunted, giving his broad shoulders an expressive shrug, "nor you either."

"Oh, is that so?" the would-be hero pushed out his mug.

Scoop gave a jerky laugh.

"Gosh! I wouldn't ask you to do it, Red," he admitted frankly. "For I certainly wouldn't do it myself. But if you really think you can——"

And there he stopped.

"Sure thing," Red was dead certain of himself. "I've been to the top of that flagpole

before. You fellows ought to remember the time when the rope got caught in its pulley and old Louie, the janitor, gave me two bits for fixing it."

"But staying up there is a much different matter," declared Peg.

"If Sitting Bull can do it," Red further stepped around, acting more cocky-like every minute, "it will be pie for me."

"Be careful that it isn't 'ash," put in Rory, referring to a possible fall.

Scoop, as the saying is, was ready to grab at any kind of a straw to save our sinking newspaper.

"All right," he laughed. "If you want to try it, and have confidence in yourself, go crawl into your pink underwear. We'll surely help you all we can."

Peg gave another tantalizing hee-haw.

"This is going to be funny."

"I suppose you think I can't do it," bridled Red, resenting Peg's laugh.

"I'm hoping," said Peg, "that you don't skid when you get halfway up and land on your head. For it would be a shame to punch a big hole in the pretty sod at the foot of the pole."

"Tra-la-la-la," Red sang daringly. "You needn't worry about me, onion breath. For I'm a regular Human Fly when it comes to climbing flagpoles. As for old Sitting Bull, he'll wish that he'd done the right thing here

when he learns how easily I took his championship away from him."

Peg's eyes were dancing.

"And you want us to feed you, huh?" he quizzed.

"I think you should."

"Will you eat everything we send up?" came the added quick inquiry.

"I won't eat anything you send up," was Red's equally quick reply.

Peg's good-natured laugh rang through the print shop.

"I wish you were my brother, Red," he gave the smaller one an affectionate pat on the back. "For there's no one in this world, outside of my own family, that I think as much of as I do of you."

And he meant it, too. Which shows you what bully pals we are, ready to fight for one another at the drop of a hat.

"Honest, though," Peg went on earnestly, "I wish you wouldn't do it, Red. For if anything should happen to you we'll be a thousand times worse off than we are right now."

"But nothing can go wrong if I use a rope."

"There's always the chance of a fall."

"Shucks! Those Baltimore kids didn't fall."

"But they never roosted on flagpoles," I put in quickly, sharing Peg's uneasiness. "They had regular platforms built on the top of their poles."

"Very well then," Red promptly adopted the suggestion. "Let's build a platform on top of the totem pole."

"And erect it in the public square?" I stared at him, thinking of Mrs. Pangborn and the probable consequences of our act.

"A better place, I think, will be in our front yard. For we live on Main Street. And nobody can kick if we put up the pole on private property."

"Now you're talking!" Scoop cried excitedly. "That flagpole stuff was out of your line, Red. But we can put on this other stunt. Easy. And it'll be just as hot as the promised performance."

" 'Otter, I think," put in Rory.

"Sure thing," I cried, in similar excitement. "When Sitting Bull and those kids were bucking each other in Baltimore the kids got twice as much attention as old Sitting Bull himself. And when one of the amateurs was crowned champion over five thousand people turned out to see the ceremony."

Yes, sir, we were all set now—that is, we would be all set, with clear sailing ahead of us, if Mr. Ott would consent to the plan, which he did, glad, I guess, that the rejected pole was going to do somebody some good.

So we had the pole hauled over to Red's house that afternoon, very thankful, of course, that business, having to do with her beauty

parlor, had taken Aunt Pansy to Chicago. And, to that point, how she'd rave when she returned and found the hated totem pole (for she was one of Mrs. Pangborn's most ardent supporters) stuck up in her own front yard, with the pride of the household parked on top of it! Yes, it would be an awful shock to her. And she'd do everything she could to chase the performer down. But he was determined not to be chased. This was one time, he told us grimly, as we hauled the pole into position with a block and tackle, having, of course, provided a suitable hole for it (in the middle of Mrs. Meyers' tulip bed), that he was going to have his own way.

Scoop and Peg constructed the platform, which sort of fitted over the stovepipe hat of the pole's crowning figure. And did Red ever look comical sitting up there, his mug sort of matching the rest of the carved figures! The kids, of course, had gathered from blocks around. And soon the whole town knew that the Meyers boy, one of the *Bugle's* youthful editors, to make good his newspaper's promises, was taking the unreliable champion's place, with the difference that the amateur performer was roosting in his own front yard on the much discussed totem pole. No wonder that the Tutterites came from all directions to see the free show. As for Mrs. Gussie, having taken a peek at the confident pole-sitter her-

self, she gripped her editorial pen tighter than ever, determined to give us the walloping of our lives. "Tutter," she blaa-blaaed, "is now witnessing its crowning disgrace, though, with the well-meaning parents of these misguided boys in mind, the least said about the matter the better. Our duty, of course, is plain. More than ever must we preach the doctrine of true culture, thus leading our youth into the right paths. It is the only thing that will protect our fair city against a repetition of the disgraceful exhibition now blotting Main Street."

This time, though, she left out the usual "Down-with-the-totem-pole!" stuff, figuring, I guess, that if she and her kind now upset the pole poor Red would get a broken neck—which probably was what would happen to him anyway, the majority of the spectators predicted, as he entertained them with various acrobatic stunts.

Dad almost laughed himself sick when he came by and found us attending to the totem-pole sitter. Other business men took the same humorous view of the affair. So it isn't surprising that all kinds of gifts began to arrive for the nervy performer. First he received a box of candy from one of the merchants. Then another merchant sent him a whole case of pop. He got cookies, too, and cake and ice cream—so much stuff, in fact, that we had to enlarge the platform to accommodate it.

"Don't forget," he told me, when the six o'clock whistle blew, calling me home to supper, "that you're to take my place on the newspaper staff."

Which explains briefly how this book got its title. Jerry Todd, Editor-in-Chief! I felt pretty big over my new job. But let me tell you what happened that night. Suffering cats! Then is when the "grief" began to roll in.

"Are you really going to stay here all night?" I heard a kid ask Red, when I stopped at the pole on my way downtown.

"Sure thing," was the sitter's chesty reply.

"Gee!" the kid's eyes swelled. "But what if it rains?"

"I've got an umbrella," Red gestured carelessly.

"Just the same *I* wouldn't want to be sittin' on a big pole like that if the wind came up."

Nor me either, was my thought.

"If it storms, Red," I advised, "you'd better come down."

"Like so much mud."

"But what if we have a cloudburst?"

"It's all in the game."

"Boy," I acknowledged frankly, "I can't say that I envy you your job."

"The first two weeks," said he, speaking as though from experience, "is the hardest."

I told him then that I was on my way downtown.

"Don't forget," said he, "that I'm doing this to help the newspaper. So work up a lot of stuff about me—the boy hero—still clinging faithfully to his perch—undaunted by rain or snow, and so on. You know what I mean. And if I can help the advertising along by wearing pink underwear, bring it around."

"Good old Red!" I bragged.

"My only fear is," he added, "that Aunt Pansy will drop dead when she gets here at ten o'clock."

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him that women of his aunt's stamp weren't in the habit of dropping dead over the antics of small boys. More probably, I thought, familiar with her ways, she'd grab a long pole and punch a hole through him. But I didn't say anything. For there was no need of worrying him.

Scoop and I got to the print shop together.

"Look me over," I told him, kind of chesty-like.

"Meaning which?" said he curiously.

"I've got Red's job," I informed. "I'm the new Editor-in-Chief."

"In that case," a feminine voice spoke sharply over my shoulder, "you're just the person I want to see."

It was Mrs. Norman Gregory, the rich cattle woman.

"Please step this way," I led her into my private office. Then, just as polite as I knew

how, I offered her a chair. But she wouldn't sit down.

Something had happened to upset and vex her. I could see that, all right. For she had an angry look on her face. And never dreaming for a single instant that it was *me* that she longed to pull apart, limb by limb, I got out my pencil and pad, figuring, as the *Bugle's* chief news gatherer, that she had dropped in to tell me something more about her pure-bred calves.

CHAPTER VIII

EDITOR-IN-GRIEF

I was all ready now to take down Mrs. Gregory's story. But the pencil and pad sort of percolated through my limp fingers, and my knees began to shimmey, when the visitor, with added fire in her eyes, unrolled a copy of our current newspaper, pointing with a jabbing finger to the article that I had written about her.

"I suppose," she snapped, "that this is your idea of a joke."

So it was *me* that she was sore at! Still, I didn't know *why* she was sore at me. For certainly, was my dazed thought, I had done nothing to her to make her sore. To the contrary I had been very liberal, allowing her half a column with a double-column heading. At regular advertising rates it would have cost her three dollars or more.

Then I began to wonder, kind of anxious-like, with the responsibilities of my job in mind, if I had misspelled her name, or something. For women are touchy about such things.

"Joke?" I repeated, kind of fumbling around for words.

"Yes, *joke,*" she spit out, cutting a hole through me with her blazing eyes.

Which made me more dizzy-like than ever.

"The jokes are on the inside page," I told her feebly.

But when I tried to show them to her she yanked the newspaper away from me.

"There's a good one about a Scotchman," I sort of rambled around, still uncertain what to say or do. "He had a fence around his hen-house. But afraid that the egg layers would wear it out, looking through it, he took it down and stored it in his woodshed."

"I would like to take you to a woodshed, young man," she spoke in a tone that left no doubt as to her meaning. "And, to that point," she went on, in the same sharp way, "you can congratulate yourself that you *are* an inexperienced boy. Otherwise my family would attend to you."

And she wasn't fooling, either. Gosh! That talk of hers kind of took the kink out of me. Evidently, I concluded, I had done something worse than tangling up the letters of her name.

"I should have known better," she went on, "than to let you interview me in the first place. But I am well acquainted with your parents. And having confidence in them I trusted you, too, little dreaming, of course, that I'd become

the laughingstock of the whole community. "Oh," her anger blazed anew, "the more I think about it the madder I get."

I wanted to tell her to quit thinking about it. For I didn't like the way she was acting. It made me nervous.

"I never was so embarrassed in all my life," she went on. "And known all over the country as I am, think how I'll feel if the amused larger dailies copy your insulting heading in their funny columns."

"But what's the matter with it?" I cried helplessly.

"Read it," she again shoved the newspaper at me, "and refresh your mind—if you have such a thing."

Here is the heading, just as Peg had set it up on the front page of the newspaper:

COME AND SEE MRS. GREGORY'S CALVES

It certainly looked all right to me. And when I told her so, all worked up by her attack, she gave me a pitying look, as though I didn't know much, and started stiffly for the door.

"Before you attempt to write any more newspaper articles about *calves,*" she scathingly emphasized the word, "I would suggest that you consult your book of synonyms. For the next woman to suffer from your editorial stupidity may not be so willing to drop the matter as me."

Calves! I saw now, with a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, what was wrong. I had forgotten to take into consideration that there are two kinds of calves, the kind she had attached to her body and the kind she raised in her big barn. And she thought (or, rather, she *had* thought, though now probably convinced of my innocence) that I had purposely twisted the heading around to make it appear that she was going to make a show of herself!

Gosh! I never was so mortified in all my life. As though I *would* do a thing like that! Why, if the truth must be told, I never had thought of a woman's calves in all my life. I wanted to run after her and tell her so, too. For my parents' sake, I wanted her to know that I wasn't that kind of a boy. I guess, though, the uncomfortable thought wedged itself into my cluttered head, that she knew it already. In fact, it was suggested by her actions, that she thought I was too green for my own good.

Well, I drew a deep breath, it was a cinch that I wouldn't make the same mistake twice. Hereafter I'd be more careful with my headings. For my nervous system wasn't strong enough to withstand shocks like this.

Scoop came into the room with a big grin on his face.

"What's the matter with you and the old girl?" he quizzed curiously.

I told him.

"Haw! haw! haw!" he laughed. "That's funny."

"It isn't funny to me," I replied.

"We'll have the whole country talking about us, and copying our stuff, if this keeps up."

Then he patted me on the back, telling me to forget it. All newspapers fumbled, he said, which sometimes made it unpleasant for the Editor-in-Chief. Yet, at that, the latter's job was a big honor and one that gave him a lot of satisfaction.

Which was largely boloney—for I know Scoop! Still, it was nice stuff to think about.

"To-morrow," said he, "I'm going to call on the merchants whose advertising appeared in our newspaper to-day and line them up for the changed program. For there's no reason why we can't build the campaign around Red (if he holds out) just as well as around old Sitting Bull himself. And maybe next week we'll be able to start a daily."

I heaved a sigh.

"You certainly are ambitious," I told him.

"We're working for ourselves, Jerry. So it'll pay us to buckle down and do our best."

"You seem to overlook the fact," I said, "that the printer has relatives. And sooner or later they'll show up here to claim his stuff. Then where will we be, after all of our hard work?"

"We'll have the experience. And if we want to keep on it'll be easy to get another start. I'd be willing to bet dollars to doughnuts, though," he spoke with conviction, "that old Cassibaum's relatives leave him entirely alone, this print shop included. And having been told to go ahead and use his stuff we may have the chance to completely wear it out."

Which was possible, of course. But I doubted it. Anyway, was my sensible thought, how could we run a newspaper, even a weekly, when school started? For certainly we'd get in bad with our parents and the teachers alike if we neglected our lessons.

Yes, Scoop was dead sure that his life's career was cut out for him. And with that big imagination of his I dare say he already looked forward to the time when he'd be as wealthy and influential, in newspaper circles, as Mr. Hearst himself. But I had my doubts, as I say. And these doubts multiplied when Mr. Swineburn, the Main Street butcher, whose "boloney" advertisement had appeared in our initial issue, stopped in, shortly after Mrs. Greogory's huffy departure, to bawl us out.

"So a bum meat market it is that I run, huh?" the newcomer scowled darkly, reminding me for all the world of a picture that I had seen of an educated baboon. "So bum it is," he added, in the same gruff, unfriendly manner, "that you have to tell about it in your

newspaper. And only two bites to the pound do my customers get of the nice boloney that I sell, huh? Maybe it is pay, in American money, that you expect to get from me for making such monkeyshines of my business. A big foolishness it is," he snapped in conclusion, with angry eyes, "for which not one penny will I pay you."

Scoop tried to sneak away.

"He's the guy to talk to," I quickly told the irritated meat carver, who has the biggest arms and the fattest stomach of any man in Tutter. Ordinarily, too, like so many fat men, he's jolly and good-natured. But he was all worked up now.

"The newspaper what you print to-day, with so much foolishness in it, my wife Henrietta she hand to me and she say: 'Herman, you take it over to the newspaper office and the ears of that smart young editor you box with it.' "

"There he is," Scoop promptly pointed to me. "See the sign on his desk? It says: 'Editor-in-Chief.' "

"But *he's* the guy who handles the advertising," I quickly pointed in turn.

"Sure, maybe it's two pairs of ears that need boxin'," an Irish voice spoke from the doorway; and into the room strode Mr. Barney Kelly, the proprietor of Kelly's Big Bakery on School Street.

And what, I wondered, staring at the new-

comer kind of sinking-like, was the matter with *his* advertisement? For the grim look on his rugged face told me as plainly as words why he was here.

Recognizing the visitor, Mr. Swineburn's big stomach began to heave up and down.

"By golly," he laughed, "so funny was it what I read about you in the newspaper, Meester Keely. Competition is it that you make for me with your 'pig' bakery? Maybe in my own shop I sell it some of those 'fakes' what you advertise, which, my Henrietta say as she make the big laugh, is cakes. So funny it is, Meester Kelly, that maybe you excuse me if I laugh."

I felt like telling him, fat tub that he was, to stop laughing or he'd shake the plaster loose. And then, as the angry baker approached the desk, I kind of edged closer to the open window, wondering, as I checked up on it out of the corner of my eye, if I could jump through it in a pinch.

Scoop was looking silly now.

"Is anything wrong with your advertisement, Mr. Kelly?" he inquired.

"Sure," thundered the Irishman, "if there's anything that ain't wrong with it I'd like to have ye tell me about it."

There was a copy of the newspaper on my desk. And turning to the baker's advertisement, this is what I read:

We Specialize in Fakes of
All Kinds

The home of that delirious corn-cob bread that the whole town is gagging up.

Kelly's Pig Bakery
414 Fool Street

Suffering cats! No wonder the baker was sore. Then I read the butcher's advertisement:

Oh, Boloney!

Buy it from us in links or length at two bites to the pound. Why go elsewhere and be cheated worse?

Swine's Bum Meat Market
616 Pain Street

It was Peg's fault, of course. Still, typesetting was a new job to him, as we tried to explain to the angry advertisers, who now, though, were laughing at each other. No doubt old hefty had done his best. But his best was pretty punk. If as many similar mistakes had appeared in the balance of the newspaper, it was a cinch, I told myself, that our printing days would soon be over. Instead of newspaper publishers we'd be the center of attraction at a five-cornered funeral.

"Ho, ho, ho!" the fat butcher further heaved his stomach up and down, to the peril of the

building's walls and ceiling. "So funny is it, Meester Kelly, about your fakes and your corncob bread which the whole town is gagging up, that maybe you will pardon me if I laugh some more. And my Henrietta, so much did she laugh when the newspaper she read to me at dinner time that she make a split in her waistband."

"'Why go elsewhere and be cheated worse?'" the baker then quoted from the other's garbled advertisement, in similar ridicule. "Sure, if it's somethin' funny that your Henrietta is lookin' for, she should read that. 'Two bites to the pound!' Haw! haw! haw!"

And then did *we* ever laugh when they got into a jangle, as is often the case when two men start kidding each other. I don't mean that they flattened noses, and stuff like that. But they were glaring at each other like a couple of rival tomcats when, after a wordy battle of cracked Irish and broken German, they left in different directions for home.

Which was two advertising accounts, I told Scoop dejectedly, that we could safely kiss good-by.

As the saying is, we were getting no place fast.

But along with the grief we got a little cheer. For we actually booked an order that night for some handbills and show programs.

I'll tell you about it.

CHAPTER IX

THE VANISHED TOTEM POLE

Someone of depraved musical taste having bragged on his singing farther down the street, Peg rolled into the print shop at eight-thirty prepared to give us a treat.

"My Ad-a-li-i-ine!" he enthusiastically whooped it up with his cracked bass voice, sort of posing, grand-opera fashion, in the doorway. "Swee-e-et Ad-a-li-i-ine!" he further boomed, bearing down hard on the final syllable. And then did he ever duck for cover, with a startled yip, when we started pitching the office furniture at him.

For we had suffered enough at his hands as it was!

An empty inkwell kissed the wall over his head, showering him with plaster.

"Thus die all traitors," screeched Scoop, hurriedly searching the desk for more ammunition.

"And punk typesetters," I chimed in, getting in a beautiful shot with the office dustpan.

There was another shower of plaster.

"Hel-lp!" squawked the Metropolitan Opera

Company, as he crouched good-naturedly behind a wabbly bookcase.

Suddenly the battle was interrupted by the entrance of a tall, willowy, thin-faced man with a mincing gait and bushy cheek whiskers (regular Smith Brothers stuff!), whose pant legs and coat sleeves fitted him like the bark of a tree. So comical, indeed, was his general appearance as he stood blankly in the doorway, and so unusual in every respect, that we dropped our ammunition and stared at him.

"Who is he?" Scoop whispered to me, when the visitor's questioning eyes, the most noticeable part of his fish-like face, turned from us to the object of our joint attack, who, confident that the worst was over, now hobbled into sight.

"Search me," I quickly whispered back.

Old Cassibaum's worn dictionary having shed its liver and onion sections during the merry fracas (meaning the "L" and "O" pages), you can imagine what the office looked like. Noah Webster's brains, as you might say, scattered every which way. Chairs were upset, too. And the leaky water cooler, which, whenever we treated it to a cake of ice, made a Grand Canal from the editorial desk to the job press in the outer room, was standing on its nose in a corner.

Satisfied, I guess, that what he first had mistaken for attempted murder was really nothing

more than a friendly boyish battle, the visitor dished out a somewhat simple smile and proceeded to get better acquainted with us.

"When the cat's away," he quoted, in a sort of playful, simpering voice, acting for all the world as though he wanted to mince over to where we were and tickle us under the chins, baby-fashion, "the mice will play."

Men like that give me a pain. And having taken a quick dislike to him I further felt like telling him that we weren't mere office boys cutting up during our employer's absence, as he thought, but the firm's big noise itself.

Then, to my amazement, and the similar astonishment of my chums, he stooped quickly, arching his thin back like a rainbow, and picked up a crisp twenty-dollar bill.

"The drunkard's curse and the widow's blessing," he further quoted, carefully dusting the bill, after which he folded it with elaborate care, seemingly completely unmindful of us, and tucked it into a pocket of his showy checkered vest, across the front of which hung a gold watch chain. And having followed the sort of deft movements of his long, slim fingers, I noticed, too, that he wore two flashy rings, one of which was weighted down with a diamond the size of a hickory nut.

At least, so brightly did it sparkle in the lamplight that it seemed that big to me.

Scoop came to life.

"Hey!" he yipped, springing forward. "Give me back that money."

But when the vest pocket was turned inside out, after considerable arguing back and forth, the visitor letting on meanwhile that the younger one's growing anger highly amused him, there was no money there!

"Where is it?" cried Scoop.

"Where is what?" the visitor inquired innocently.

"The twenty-dollar bill that you picked up on the floor."

"Did I pick up a twenty-dollar bill?" the visitor further pretended innocence.

"You're blamed tootin'," Peg stepped forward, with a mean look on his face. "And if you don't shell out we'll take you down and search you."

"But even admitting that I did pick up a twenty-dollar bill," the man parried pleasantly, seemingly not at all upset by the situation, "how can you prove that I didn't drop it myself?"

"We probably wouldn't argue with you about it," said Peg, who, of course, had no intention of telling the stranger about the robbery, "if it were a ten-dollar bill. But we have a peculiar claim on all of the twenty-dollar bills that are picked up around here. So shell out."

Then did we ever feel simple when the smil-

ing visitor, who was widely known on the stage as the Great Bosworth, told us, with noticeable pride, that he was a celebrated magician. Having rented Clark's Hall, where earlier Mrs. Pangborn and her husband had been entertained so lavishly, he was going to give two Friday performances, one in the afternoon, of particular interest to the kids, and the other in the evening. Needing handbills and programs he had come to us, he said, having been told we did good printing cheap—though it was a big surprise to him, he tacked on, acting kind of uncertain-like, to discover that the business was run by boys.

He'd soon learn, we told him, determined to get the order, that youth was no handicap in the printing business. Our work, we said, would be a big surprise to him. And all the time I was scared stiff that he'd pick up our newspaper, which, at the first convenient chance, I chucked into the waste-paper basket. Suffering cats! If he had gotten his eyes on those two mutilated advertisements there would have been no further talk about handbills, let me tell you.

"And is that why you socked me?" grinned the offending typesetter, when we later made him read his own rotten junk.

"You're lucky," growled Scoop, "that we didn't scalp you alive. Honest, Peg, I thought you knew how to spell."

"Try it yourself," old hefty growled in pattern, laying the blame on the worn machine.

"Anyway," said Scoop, looking at the "copy" that the magician had left with us, "we've got to be more careful with this job. Don't you proof-read your stuff at all?"

"You didn't give me time to-day."

"Well, for heaven's sake take time hereafter. And let me help you, too. Between the two of us we ought to get everything straight, thus proving to the people around here that we can do good printing."

Eager to get to work, Peg went out in the back room and started the typesetting machine, calling on Rory to help him when the latter stopped in on the way home from a picture show.

" 'Ot dog!" enthused the newcomer, when told that a magician who was going to put on a double show in Clark's Hall had given us a ten-dollar printing job.

"We don't know yet," said Scoop, "whether we under- or over-charged him. But we should worry. For we're getting everything free. Later on, though, when we're using our own stuff, we'll have to be more systematic."

It seemed odd to fool around down there without Red. And knocking off at nine-thirty, Peg having practically completed the typesetting job, we meandered up Main Street, arm in

arm, hurrying when we heard the Chicago train pull in.

"Poor Red!" laughed Scoop. "For what Aunt Pansy will do when she gets her eyes on him! Oh, baby!"

"He thinks," I passed the information along, "that she'll drop dead."

Scoop gave another laugh.

"Something will drop, all right. There's no doubt about that. But I venture to predict that it won't be Aunt Pansy herself."

The pole-sitter seemed glad to see us.

"I didn't know it was going to be so lonesome," he looked down from his perch, the earlier enthusiasm having deserted him.

"The first two weeks," I told him, dishing out some of his own stuff, "is the hardest."

"I bet a cookie," said he, kind of hopeful-like, "that Aunt Pansy will make me come down."

"Haw! haw! haw!" jeered Peg. "I knew you wouldn't have the nerve to stick it out."

"Sh-h-h-h!" said Red, as a taxicab came into sight. "Here she comes now."

And then, as the yellow cab made a complete circle under the electric light and started back downtown, I could almost hear his heart sink.

But he wouldn't admit that he was sick of his job. For he had done a lot of blowing. And he hated to be laughed at.

At ten-thirty word was received through a

neighbor woman, over the telephone, that Aunt Pansy, entirely uninformed, of course, on the sort of dramatic developments in her own front yard, had found it necessary to prolong her Chicago trip another day.

"You're to go over and stay with the Todd boy," the neighbor informed in conclusion.

"But how can I," said Red unhappily, "when I've got to sit up here?"

"We might move the pole," joked Peg.

"Sure thing," chimed in Rory. "Let's 'aul it over and put it up under Jerry's bedroom window. Then they can 'old 'ands and 'ug each other."

"Oh, I wish you smart alecks would evaporate," Red began to lose his temper.

"Listen!" Peg motioned for silence.

"What was it?" I inquired breathlessly.

"Sounded like thunder."

It *was* thunder.

"Still got your umbrella?" I cheerfully inquired of the noticeably uneasy pole-sitter.

"Sure thing," he tried to speak bravely.

"Well, you'd better hang onto it," I advised. "For the indications are that you'll need it before morning."

"Tra-la-la-la-la!" he sang. "It'll take more than a shower to scare me."

"Look at that big black cloud!" Peg got excited. "I bet anything it's a cloudburst."

"Or a 'urricane," contributed Rory.

"Poof!" the pole-sitter snapped his fingers.

"Listen, Red," Scoop spoke seriously. "If you're really scared, come on down. For it's going to be blamed lonesome up there after we leave. And that storm is getting closer every minute."

"Yes, you would like to have me come down so that you and that other big slob beside you could make fun of me."

"Not me," Peg put in quickly, as earnest now as the leader himself. "I know you've got grit, Red. You don't have to stay up there to prove it to me."

"But I *want* to stay up here."

"It probably would be a big thing for our newspaper if you did stick it out," added Scoop. "But forget about that if you want to come down. We're bosom pals, Red. Remember that. And we stand together in everything."

"Absolutely," Peg put a lot of feeling into the word.

The two, you see, convinced that the pole-sitter really wanted to come down, and admiring him for the loyal, trustworthy (and sometimes foolish!) pal that he was, were trying to make it as easy as possible for him to kiss his championship dreams good-by. It would upset our newspaper plans, of course. And the other kids would razz him, calling him a quitter,

and stuff like that. But somehow, now that night had come, we didn't like the idea of leaving him there in the dark. For he meant a lot to us. And certainly the newspaper wasn't everything.

But would he listen to our coaxing and come down? Not on your life! He got real nasty about it, too. So, to sort of teach him a lesson, we left him and sought our own beds, Peg getting permission from his parents to sleep with me.

"Well," inquired Mother, when my chum and I tumbled into the sitting room where she and Dad were playing two-handed Rummy, "how did you come out to-day?"

"Pretty fair," I told her wearily.

"It'll pay you, I think," said Dad, who evidently had given our newspaper special attention, "to be more careful with your spelling."

"And for heaven's sake," blushed Mother, "watch your headings. For that one about Mrs. Gregory is terrible. You must remember, Jerry, that all people aren't as innocent-minded as you are."

"Mrs. Gregory thought that I did it on purpose," I confessed uncomfortably.

"Then you've already talked with her about it?" Mother inquired quickly, hoping, I guess, that the blunder hadn't gotten me into serious trouble.

Hearing my story, she then inquired if it were true that Red was going to sit on the totem pole all night.

"He's still up there," I told her.

"How ridiculous!" she sputtered. "I was in hopes that his aunt would make him come down."

"She's still in Chicago," I explained.

"And is he over there all alone?" A worried note crept into Mother's voice. For Red and I have chummed together so long that she feels a sort of personal interest in him.

"Sure thing."

"Oh, dear!" she gave a nervous gesture. "He'll be on my mind all night. And for two cents I'd send a telegram to his parents. Still, I'd hate to spoil their trip."

"If you'll wait till morning," I laughed, Peg joining me, "I think your worries will be over. For he's beginning to weaken."

Tired, my chum and I then went upstairs to bed, Peg awakening me at twelve o'clock.

"Have you got a bathing suit, Jerry?" he inquired.

A bathing suit! I pinched myself to make sure that I wasn't still asleep. For what in the name of common sense could he want of a bathing suit at that time of night?

More fully awakened then by the rain, as it beat furiously against our windows, driven by a gale that seemed determined to uproot every

tree within a mile of us, I caught onto his intended scheme. He was worried about Red. And he wanted to go over there and thus make sure that the nervy pole-sitter was safe.

Instead of one bathing suit I got two, giving my chum the biggest. This was one way of getting a midnight bath, was my thought, as we guardedly descended the stairs and locked ourselves outside, putting the door key into the mail box. Thus exposed to the storm we shivered at first. For the rain, as it beat against our half-naked bodies, was cold. And for a moment or two I was tempted to go back and get my slicker.

"Come on," cried Peg, starting down the street, the gutters of which were full to the brim. Boy, I never saw so much water in all my life! And did I ever laugh when old hefty, like the big cow that he is, took a header into a puddle, completely disappearing.

But my laughter dried up like a drop of water on a red-hot stove when we turned into Red's yard, now aglow with lightning. For all that was left of the totem pole, so to speak, was a hole in the ground.

The pole itself had completely disappeared!

CHAPTER X

ADDED MYSTERY

The totem pole, with its succession of carved wooden figures of varying shapes, some with beaks a foot long and others with elephant-like ears, had a total weight of several hundred pounds, which made its disappearance all the more amazing.

Had Red himself, tricky little rat that he is at times and fond of sensational stuff, engineered its disappearance? That wasn't improbable. Yet how had he managed it? In other words, who had helped him? Certainly, was my quick conclusion, as I stood beside the empty hole now fast filling with water, he never had moved the pole alone. That was impossible. For it had taken all five of us to pull it up with a block and tackle.

But granting that the freckled one *had* managed the pole's disappearance (with help), what had been his motive? Was it a scheme of his to get his name spread all over the front page of our own and other neighboring newspapers? Donald Meyers, Main Street's champion pole-sitter, mysteriously vanishes, and so

on. Certainly, his disappearance—if he *had* actually disappeared—coupled with that of the totem pole itself, would cause a sensation. The newspaper men would make a big thing of it. For not even the Baltimore kids had thought of sitting on a real totem pole. That was Red's own unique idea. And learning of the local controversy (I guess that's what you'd call it) the people far and near would take sides, some rooting for us and others, like Mrs. Pangborn, opposing us.

Peg, though, didn't think very highly of my theory when I dished it out to him.

"I'd sooner think," he spoke reflectively, "that the pole has been stolen. For you know yourself what a lazy little runt Red is. Howls, even, if he has to mow the lawn once a week. I've heard him. So I can't picture him going to all this work just to get his name in the newspapers."

Which, I was compelled to admit, with mounting bewilderment, was good sense. And convinced now that the pole-sitter had vacated his perch before the peculiar thieves had appeared on the scene, we ran to the house to get the sleeper out of bed.

"For the love of mud!" growled Peg, as we pounded unsuccessfully on the front door. "What's the matter with that guy anyway? Does he sleep with his head in a feather pillow?"

The silence within the dark house was tomb-like.

"You may find out," I spoke uneasily, as peculiar fears began crowding in on me, "that this is a much more serious matter than you think."

I was given a searching look.

"Meaning which?" the sharp inquiry was shoved at me.

"He may not be in his bed at all."

"And you still think," old hefty further searched my face, as he sort of weighed my words, "that he actually skinned out with the totem pole himself?"

"Either that," I shivered, as another gob of cold rain socked me on the bare legs, "or the totem-pole thieves, whoever they are, skinned out with him."

Peg was staring now, his under jaw sort of sagging.

"By George!" he cried, with mounting excitement. "I wonder if you're right."

Remembering that Aunt Pansy seldom fastened the bathroom window, which gave onto the back porch roof, I suggested getting a ladder, of which Mr. Meyers had several in the barn. But Peg couldn't see the need of waiting for a ladder. And locking his sturdy arms and legs around one of the porch columns he put on a climbing stunt that would have done credit to an Australian monkey.

"Come on, Jerry," he panted, pulling himself onto the flat roof.

It isn't so easy, let me tell you, to climb a wet porch column. And when I finally dragged my dripping carcass onto the roof I was panting like a tuckered puppy.

"Don't ever tell me," grinned Peg, thinking, I guess, of stuff that he had read in the Chicago newspapers, "that Tutter can't have its porch climbers, too."

Boy, I felt like a porch climber, all right, the more so when the bathroom window rolled up with a sort of creepy squeak, uncovering a well of interior darkness.

"It wouldn't be so hot for us," I shivered, "if Red, mistaking us for a pair of crooks, socked us on the bean with a baseball bat."

"I'd kiss him," Peg declared stoutly, "if he socked *me* on the bean with a baseball bat."

And he meant it, too. Which shows you how great was his hope that we'd find the beloved pole-sitter sound asleep in his own bed.

Better informed on the location of the freckled one's room than my present companion, I took the lead when we were inside, my heart sort of hovering around in the roof of my mouth, as the saying is. For I couldn't get away from the jerky feeling that someone in authority here was liable to pop up in front of us at any moment and deal with us as intruders.

"Don't touch me," I cautioned Peg, in a shivery voice. "For if you do I'll scream."

Counting the doors, as I touched them in the dark, and stopping at the third one from the bathroom, I pressed the electric switch, hoping, of course, as the light sprang up, to find a pair of pants draped on one chair and a shirt on another. For that is the way Red usually scatters his stuff around when he gets ready for bed. You know how boys are!

But everything was in perfect order. And in the silence that followed our first comprehensive glimpse of the room's interior, both Peg and I were momentarily stunned.

"And you're sure it's his bed?" old hefty spoke huskily, touching the undisturbed covers with a trembling hand.

I pointed to a rattlesnake skin and other familiar wall trophies, among them a pair of stuffed owls that now glared at us hatefully with their secretive glass eyes, proof in themselves of the room's youthful ownership.

There's something spooky about an empty house, especially at night. And having entered here under such shivery circumstances, the place, with its rambling halls and scattered rooms, was particularly unnerving to me. On the way to the telephone in the lower dining room I found myself listening to the peculiar pattering echoes of our bare feet. Once something cold and clammy, like a dead man's hand,

sort of brushed the back of my bare neck. Nor was I convinced when Peg told me that it was the water dripping from my hair. Peculiarly, too, I had the scared feeling, as we came to the foot of the broad stairs, that something we couldn't see or hear, having followed us to the upper landing, was now looking down on us with covert, unfriendly eyes.

It's hard to define my fears. But chief among them was a queer, shivery fear of the man or men who were accountable for the totem pole's disappearance. Either they had a peculiar hidden object in mind in stealing the unusual pole, was my kind of scattered conclusion, or they themselves were peculiar-minded. And how unfortunate for our poor chum if he had indeed fallen into their hands. Certainly, as Peg said, the sooner we got Scoop on the scene the better. For he's the mainspring of our organization when it comes to solving mysteries. And one of our own chums having become involved in this particular mystery, with possible dangers to himself, there was urgent need of reaching him quickly, which could be accomplished only through a clearing up of the mystery surrounding his disappearance and the similar disappearance of the totem pole, on which he had aspired to establish a new world's record.

Looking up Scoop's number in the telephone book, Peg put in a call, Mr. Ellery himself get-

ting out of bed to answer it. And was he ever crusty when we asked for our chum.

"Some parents may think it's smart to let their kids prowl around town at all hours of the night," he snapped, "but I want my boy home in bed. And I don't thank you either for breaking up my rest."

"But you *must* call him!" Peg cried desperately. "For thieves have stolen our totem pole. They've taken Red, too. And we need Scoop's help."

Then we heard the leader himself.

"What's the matter, Pa?" the question sounded faintly in the background, suggesting to us that the speaker was calling down the stairs.

"Oh," Mr. Ellery spoke with added impatience, "it's those young tomcats that you chum around with. They say the Meyers boy has been kidnaped."

I could picture Scoop flying down the stairs. And then, learning where we were and what had happened, telling us quickly in return that he, too, had been worried about the exposed pole-sitter which explains why he had gotten up when the telephone rang, he jumped into his clothes, making the trip from his house to Red's in less than six minutes, the storm in the meantime having completely passed over, leaving in its moonlit wake a drenched and dripping world.

"What's the idea of the bathing suits?" he panted, when we met him on the front porch.

"It was raining bobcats and pitchforks when we came over," Peg explained briefly.

The newcomer peered into the lighted hall.

"Anybody here?" he inquired in a low voice.

"No," Peg shook his head.

"But how did you fellows get in?"

"Through the bathroom window."

"And you say Red's bed hasn't been slept in at all?"

"Come up and see for yourself," said Peg, starting for the stairs.

And again I had the crazy feeling as we mounted the stairs that something up there, completely invisible to us and without sound, was craftily scuttling to cover.

"But why should anybody steal *him?*" Scoop spoke kind of scattered-like, as we stood beside the undisturbed bed.

Peg shrugged.

"It was just his hard luck, I guess, to be there when the pole was stolen."

"Though first," I put in, "we thought that he had already come down before the thieves arrived."

"Maybe he did," said Scoop quickly. "Had you thought of calling up Rory?"

Well, say! Did Peg and I ever feel dumb! For Rory's house is the nearest. And he and Red are thicker than twin peas in a pod.

But when we got Mr. Ringer out of bed he told us, in much the same crusty manner as Mr. Ellery, that the pole-sitter hadn't sought shelter at his house.

"And you're sure," Peg hung on, "that Rory didn't let him in through a window, or something?"

"Hold the line," grunted the sleepy elder, "and I'll make sure."

There was a short silence.

"No," we were informed. "Rory has the bed all to himself."

"I guess you're right," Scoop told Peg when the latter hung up. "But it still puzzles me to understand why the pole-sitter was included in the theft. It doesn't make sense to me. The pole itself, huge thing that it is—and about the *craziest* thing that anybody could steal—is almost certain to lead to the thieves' detection. So why should they further hamper themselves with a prisoner?"

"I can give you a reason," said Peg quickly.

"Shoot," the speaker accompanied the word with an eager look.

"Recognized by the pole-sitter, the thieves had to kidnap him in order to shut him up and thus save their own hides."

"But Red doesn't hobnob with thieves. So how could he recognize them?"

"These may not have been out-of-town thieves, as I first suspected."

"Aw, shucks! No one in Tuter would do a stunt like this."

Peg was peculiarly grim.

"Don't kid yourself," he waggled. "For there's plenty of people around here who would like nothing better than to have the pole disappear."

Yes, was my quick thought, and Mother was one of them! Still, I knew that she and her kind, with the possible exception of Mrs. Pangborn herself, never would stoop to such unfairness as this to gain their ends.

"Jerry's right," declared Scoop, when I put my thoughts into words. "The robbery was committed by someone from out of town. And, to that point, as you fellows know, the pole is worth thousands of dollars. So it isn't surprising to me that a gang of skilled thieves picked it up, probably intending to sell it to some scientist who has a particular interest in things of its kind."

"Scientists," declared Peg flatly, "aren't in the habit of stealing their stuff, or hiring others to steal it for them."

"Just the same," Scoop clung to his theory, as it coincided with mine, "the pole was particularly desired by someone, which accounts for its disappearance."

"And was Red particularly desired by someone, too?" was Peg's kind of scornful inquiry.

"How do you know," Scoop further theorized, trying to draw a mental picture of the night's earlier events, as they had a probable bearing on our chum's disappearance, "that the thieves, after pulling the sitter down from his perch, didn't gag him and chuck him into the barn, figuring that by the time he was found they and their peculiar booty would be miles away?"

"We can easily prove that," declared Peg, starting grimly for the back door.

"You go, too, Jerry," Scoop urged.

"How about yourself?" I held back.

"I want to look around."

The old barn having been put to various uses (we certainly made good use of it ourselves during the time that we had Bingo on our hands, as written down in my exciting *Bob-Tailed Elephant* book!), Mr. Myers had equipped the building wtih electric lights, which made it easy for Peg and I to conduct our search, one working above, in the old haymow, and the other below.

So much like the vanished totem pole itself, I wondered, with mounting excitement, if the wooden Indian, too, had been stolen. But, no, there it stood in its corner, still protected by the rug that we had wrapped around it. To make sure, though, I lifted one corner of the cover and took a peek, a curious frightened

feeling stealing over me as I found myself looking into the stoical carved face.

Peg clattered down the stairs.

"See anything?" he inquired quickly, disappointed, of course, over our unsuccessful search.

"Nothing but old Rain-in-the face," I replied.

"Every time I look at that old bird," Peg dropped the rug, having satisfied his own curiosity, "I have the queer feeling that he's got a secret packed away in his wooden head."

"That's just the way I feel, too," I spoke quickly.

There was a jerky laugh.

"Maybe he misses his master, Jerry."

Which reminded me that we had heard nothing from old Kasper since the morning of his flight. But that thought didn't occupy my mind very long. For we had other things of more importance to attend to.

Scoop was waiting for us on the back porch.

"What luck?" he inquired quickly.

"None at all," growled Peg.

Under the leader's directions we then searched the lawn for telltale footprints or wheel tracks. But the sod was unbroken.

"Which proves," Scoop quickly put his wits to work, "that the theft occurred before eleven o'clock."

"Why eleven o'clock?" Peg insisted on getting the full details.

"Because that is when the storm broke. . . . Was there much water in the bottom of the hole when you first saw it?"

"It was half full," I told him.

"More proof," he spoke with conviction, "that the theft took place before the storm broke. Which explains why the thieves' truck and the secret workers themselves left no tracks in the sod. For before this rain came the ground around here was as hard as a bone."

Then as we returned to the lighted house the leader gave a startled cry.

"It's gone!" he turned to us with a blank face.

"What?" Peg and I chorused with jumping nerves.

"Red's raincoat. It hung on that hook. I saw it when you fellows were in the barn."

Did the empty hook mean that Red himself had been in the house during our brief absence? Or, more peculiarly, had someone else been commissioned to get the needed raincoat for him?

Even Scoop was too mystified now to advance further theories.

CHAPTER XI

MEOW!

A HASTILY composed telegram having gotten her out of her hotel bed at daybreak, Aunt Pansy's actions when she arrived from the city shortly after seven o'clock were almost as much of a shock to me as the earlier disappearance of the pole itself.

Hitherto it had seemed to me that she delighted to nag at Red, calling him a little pig at the table, and junk like that. To hear her rave at him you'd think that he was the bane of her life, or whatever you call it. Nor was she troubled with paralysis of the elbow muscles if she got a chance to box his ears. All of which had led me to believe that she hated the sight of him and consequently ought to be glad to get rid of him. But now, instead of expressing relief, she wept all over the tulip bed, from the center of which, as recorded, the pole had vanished so mysteriously, telling the sympathetic neighbors, as she dabbed at her eyes with a pink lace handkerchief, that she had planned on putting him through medical college herself.

"Mr. B-b-biggle was a horse doctor," she

blubbered, referring to her dead husband, her nose getting redder every minute. "And I always wanted Donald to be a horse doctor, too. He was my favorite nephew. And if anything has happened to him I—I want to be taken myself. We'll be angels together."

She certainly would make a plump-looking angel, I told myself, still able to smile. And I wondered, too, as she further draped her three hundred pounds on the suffering neighbors, who, to save their backs, hurriedly assisted her into the house, how women, when faced by a situation like this, could be so simple-like in their talk and actions. A pair of angels! One built like a feather bed with a tent wrapped around it and the other with hair as red as a beet! No wonder the neighbor women sort of smiled at her behind her broad back. As for Red patterning after his departed uncle, it would be an unlucky day for the Tutter horse aggregation, I further smiled to myself, if the suffering beasts had to depend on him for their paregoric.

The empty hole in the tulip bed attracted almost as much curious attention as had the cocky pole-sitter himself during the short time of his aërial exhibition. People came from all over town to satisfy themselves that the much-discussed totem pole, so desirable to some and so distasteful to others, had actually disappeared. And had Mrs. Pangborn been there

to hear some of the choice remarks that were passed about her—for many of the rubbernecks openly accused her of snitching the pole to gain her own ends—I dare say she would have been mad enough to chew tenpenny nails. But though I was dead sure in my own mind that she was innocent, I didn't speak up. For if I must tell you the truth it kind of pleased me to have the people razz her behind her back, gabby old trouble-maker that she was. It surprised me, though, to learn that even Mother, hitherto one of the art crusader's stanchest supporters, seemed partly of the opinion that someone in her own clique, acting without authority, had engineered the pole's disappearance.

As for Red, it was the general opinion of the early-morning sight-seers that he either was working secretly on the other side, or had peculiarly skinned out of his own accord. Even Bill Hadley, who should have known better, asked me kind of joking-like, as I stretched a wire around the trampled flower bed to save it from further destruction, how much Mrs. Pangborn had paid the pole-sitter to accompany the carved shaft in its "disappearance." And when I told him that he was all wet, suggesting, too, that he might benefit greatly if he studied some of the rudiments of his profession, he got sore and kicked mud on me.

He certainly was dumb, I told myself, as he

disappeared into the house, Aunt Pansy, it seems, having sent for him to talk the matter over. In the first place Red never would have gone back on us—not for all the money and glory in the world. He simply wasn't that kind of a kid. And in the second place, if some gang of Mrs. Pangborn's *had* stolen the pole, they never would have dared to imprison the pole-sitter himself. For that would have turned the whole town against them, Mother included.

The more I twisted the matter around in my mind the surer I was that Scoop and I had the right dope. And when Bill called me into the house, where Aunt Pansy was sniffling on the parlor sofa, I tried to tell him again that the robbery was an outside job. But he just hee-hawed at me, more convinced than ever, after hearing my story, that some kind of unimportant trickery was afoot.

"You know yourself, ma'am," he spoke to the red-nosed guardian, who, I noticed, had changed handkerchiefs, favoring a blue one this time, "that thar hain't a trickier kid in this hul town than that thar carrot-headed nephew of your'n. An' while Jerry prob'ly is tellin' us the truth, an' actually believes that his chum has bin kidnaped, I wouldn't let it worry me none if I were you. Fur I kain't see it that way at all. An' it'll pay you, I think, to have a nice limber switch handy. Pick out a good one. An' if you need any help with it, when

the young runaway shows up, jest send fur yours truly. Fur switchin', ma'am, especially in a case like this, is one of my pet talents."

Thus consoled, Aunt Pansy dried her eyes.

"I was going to wire his father to come home. But you've convinced me that this will be unnecessary. And how great is my relief! Your words are a deep comfort to me, Mr. Hadley. Don't imagine, though," she concluded grimly, powdering her red nose, "that I'll let my feelings interfere with my later duty. That suggestion of yours about the switch is splendid. I'll be prepared!"

Poor Red! It would be no fault of theirs if he didn't end up with sore legs. But what was the use of arguing with them? A far better plan, I concluded grimly, would be to solve the mystery myself (with my chums' aid, of course) and thus prove to them just how dumb they really were.

As a matter of fact it had been a big disappointment to me that Scoop, usually so clever in putting clues together, hadn't gotten at the heart of the mystery before this. But he acted for all the world as though he had bumped his nose against a stone wall.

We knew that Red was still perched on the pole at ten-thirty. For that is when we left for home, having been told by the cocky pole-sitter himself that he intended staying there all night, rain or shine. We knew, too, that the

storm broke at eleven o'clock. And the absence of wheel marks in the sod surrounding the tulip bed bore out the leader's theory that the theft had been committed in the half hour between our departure and the storm's arrival.

But we had no proof that Red, caught on top of the pole, had been kidnaped. Nor had we any proof that he had safely abandoned the pole on the heels of our departure. But of the two possible theories we favored the former. For if he *had* abandoned the pole in safety, what in the world could be his object in skinning out? Certainly, if he knew who the thieves were, and was setting a trap for them, he would have called on us for help. Yet we had heard nothing from him. And there was the missing raincoat. Someone had taken it, almost from under our noses as it were, for possible future use. Yet I couldn't make myself believe that it was Red himself. For why should he avoid us that way? No, sir, was my firm conclusion, that final thought simply *did not* make sense.

The larger cities have places, I've been told, where thieves can dispose of their booty. But I couldn't conceive that one of these "fences," as such agents are called in the underworld, would buy a totem pole, even if the thieves were able to make safe delivery of the stolen article. So I put that thought out of my head, favoring the suggestion, as advanced by Scoop,

that the pole undoubtedly had been stolen by someone, or for someone, who particularly wanted it. And who more probably than a scientist like the one in whose honor the odd pole had been carved in the first place? But, even so, a huge thing like that—and such an unusual thing, too—couldn't long go undetected. Its new owner would be unable to make any use of it. So why had he stolen it?

Inquiry throughout the neighborhood disclosed the fact that no one had seen the thieves come or go. With the storm crowding in on them they evidently had hurriedly yanked the pole out of the ground, vanishing as mysteriously as they came. Nor had they been seen in any of the roads leading out of town. Yet, how *could* a thing as big and bulky as a totem pole so completely escape attention?

In all, I concluded, kind of dizzy-like, it was a crazy, contradictory tangle, seemingly having no rhyme or reason, as the saying is. And the more I thought about it the less headway I made. So I decided to quit thinking about it for the present and go to work, Scoop and Peg having already preceded me to the printing office.

Later that morning, the long-legged magician having called at our office for his handbills, telling us that he would pay for them immediately after the first performance, Mr. Ott posted a notice in front of the town hall, of-

fering a reward of fifty dollars to anyone supplying information that would lead to the pole's recovery, which sort of awakened the amused townspeople to the fact that the pole's theft was really a serious matter.

"Thar's a chance fur you to clean up fifty dollars, Bill," the laughing remark was passed to the marshal by one of his cronies, as I stopped beside the public bulletin board.

"Sure thing," I put in, figuring that it would do Bill good to razz him a little bit. "With all those 'pet talents' of yours that you bragged about to Mrs. Biggle, you ought to be able to find the pole in a jiffy."

"Don't worry," he eyed me kind of sour-like. "I'll find the pole when the proper time comes; an' that sneakin' chum of your'n, too, if necessary," he wound up, with a mean look on his face.

Yes, I told myself stiffly, angered by his surly jab, and he'd get his pay, too, big bully that he was, for calling one of our gang a sneak. Then I turned as an old man stopped beside us.

"Say, Bill," drawled the newcomer, in a high-pitched voice, as he spat thinly into the street, "kin you tell me whar ol' Kasper Bollan keeps hisself nowadays? He's got a clock of mine that I left thar to be fixed. An' if I've called once to git it I've called a dozen times. But I'll be caw-kicked if I kin ever find him open any more."

"He was thar last night," Bill made an effort to speak civilly. "Fur I saw a light under his shades."

"But why doesn't he open up?" grumbled the clock owner, squinting darkly down the street in the direction of the closed jewelry store.

"Mebbe he's under the weather," Bill dismissed the matter with an indifferent wave of his hand and passed on.

"Humph!" the old man spoke to himself sort of mumbling-like, as he thumped the sidewalk with his cane. "It'd sarve him right if I took this stick of mine an' busted in his window. Fur it hain't so pleasant fur me to be goin' to the neighbors every hour or so to git the time of day."

So old Kasper had returned! Peculiarly, too, he was hiding behind drawn shades! Still, his movements, however secretive, were of no particular interest to me.

Hurrying into the newspaper plant, where Peg and Rory were trying vainly to reassemble a broken collar bone, or something, that had dropped out of the big press, I found Scoop slumped in my office chair.

"We're all out of luck, Jerry," he told me, sort of discouraged-like.

"Don't tell me," I suffered a sudden chill, thinking of the completed handbill job, for which, as I say, we had been asked to wait for

our pay, "that Peg gummed up the magician's work, too."

"Oh," Scoop spoke wearily, "the handbills are all right. For I made sure of that. And the programs, too. But our advertising prospects are shot sky high."

An Editor-in-Chief, of course, is supposed to look on the bright side, sort of masterfully turning defeats into victories. And hoping that I could do as well in this particular case, I told the discouraged advertising manager to go ahead and dish out his story. But no sooner had he gotten his gab uncorked (later he told me how the manager of the Daisy Dell Dairy and the other merchants had bawled him out for using their names without permission) than Rory tumbled into the room, looking and acting for all the world as though he was being chased by a band of bloodthirsty Indians.

"It's that old maid," he gasped, tripping over the waste-paper basket.

With a final frightened squawk he went out through the open window, landing headfirst in the alley, when a tall, raw-boned woman appeared in the doorway, accompanied by at least thirty cats of various sizes and colors. Peg was there, too, sort of bringing up the rear, as bewildered by the furry invasion as we were; and maybe you think there wasn't an ear-splitting yowl when he accidentally

stepped on the skimpy tailpiece of one of the scrawny mouse catchers.

"Who is she?" he hissed in my ear, as the visitor gave her complete attention to the injured pet, cuddling it in her arms and crooning to it like a baby.

"Search me," I hissed back.

Dressed in clothes that were at least twenty years behind the times, the newcomer sure was a queer looker, all right. But the cats seemed to like her. For the one that she was comforting even licked the end of her knob-like nose. Oof! I felt like heaving up something. For you can bet your sweet life that no crummy cat will ever get the chance to lick *me* in the face. Cats are all right. But they never were intended to take the place of wash rags.

A few of the visitor's cats, I noticed, were running loose. But the most of them were tied to separate strings about six feet long, which gave the holder of the strings the appearance of being the center of a peculiar-looking cobweb.

The injured pet having been properly comforted, the visitor now turned to us with a sort of simpering smile.

"And is this a real editorial sanctum?" she inquired, kind of gushing-like, as she rubbered around the room.

Scoop was grinning from ear to ear.

"It's the most real one that we have," he informed.

"Oh-h-h-h! How thrilling! How *perfectly* thrilling! I've always wanted to see the interior of a real editorial sanctum ever since I had that poem of mine accepted about Pussy, pussy in the tree, smiling down on little me. Yet, who would suspect," she further feasted her eyes on the office scenery, "that within these very ordinary-looking gray walls some of the nation's most strategic political schemes have had their birth? Here presidents have been made and governors unmade."

"Exactly," said Scoop, bracing himself against the desk.

"Oh," the visitor posed, sort of dramatic-like, as one persistent cat clawed its way to the top of her funny-looking hat, "how wonderful indeed is the power of the press. Well might it be called the handmaiden of kings and peasants alike, because it not only shapes the destiny of individuals, but that of nations as well."

Which thoroughly convinced Peg and I, as we stood behind her, that she was completely cuckoo.

"Get ready to grab her, Jerry," old hefty hissed in my ear.

Having survived his somersault into the alley, Rory, like the woman in the Bible who was turned into a pillar of salt, couldn't re-

sist the temptation to come back to the window and take a peek. But he ducked, like a shot, when one of the cats, having appropriated the window sill for its own use, made a swipe at his skinned nose with its hooked paw.

"And now," the visitor dished out another one of her simpering smiles, "it is my duty, I suppose, to properly introduce the members of my happy little family. This," she picked up one of the germ carriers, "is Snowball; this," she pointed, "is Puffball; and this is——"

"Fishball," put in Scoop.

"I beg pardon?" the visitor stared frigidly.

"It's that blamed palate of mine," coughed the leader. "Every time I eat buns it slips."

"And this is Ruffian," the introductions continued, "and Snowflake and Calico and Pretty Girl and dear little Button himself. Notice the cunning white tip on his sweet little tail. That's why I call him Button. Isn't he a perfect little darling?"

"Simply divine," Scoop rolled his eyes like a sick cow.

"Just think, Button," the old goose then spoke to the cat, "you are in a real editorial sanctum. That iddle boy over there told mammakins so. Can't 'ou wave 'ou' iddle footsie to him, Button? Oh, 'ou precious iddle dear! How could mammakins ever live without 'ou?"

And she actually hugged the crummy thing!

No wonder Scoop staggered to the window, sort of overcome-like, and filled his lungs with fresh air.

"But you haven't told me yet who the Editor-in-Chief is," the sickening visitor then turned to us with questioning eyes.

Peg socked me in the ribs with his elbow.

"Step up, Jerry," he hissed. "Maybe you'll get a hug, too."

"And it's really you?" the visitor simpered, when the others shoved me into my official revolving chair.

"Yes, ma'am," I admitted, wondering, as I looked up at her with growing uneasiness, if she had any special reason in asking that. For though I was new at the game I was learning fast.

She was beaming now.

"And it is from your brain that the newspaper derives its splendid articles and editorials?"

I had to clear my throat to answer that one.

"Yes, ma'am," I kind of choked, hoping, if it was a lie, that I'd be forgiven.

Then, as she leaned forward, gripping the old-fashioned umbrella that she carried in her right hand, I got ready to fight. For, bu-lieve me, nobody who hugged cats could get sweet with me, even if I was an Editor-in-Chief. A boy's reputation is priceless. And I was de-

termined to protect mine with my life, if necessary.

"And the whole burden of the newspaper rests on your slender shoulders?" she further inquired, getting closer and closer.

"Yes, ma'am," I squirmed. And if you could have seen the sort of triumphant, now-you're-mine look in her green eyes you'd better understand how I felt.

The thing to do, I decided quickly, was to turn her down gently but firmly. But before I could do it—even before I could get to my feet, in fact—she socked me on the head with her umbrella.

CHAPTER XII

MORE EDITORIAL GRIEF

If you think it's an easy job to get away from a crazy woman with a stiff umbrella, just try it sometime and maybe you'll change your mind. Rory escaped through the alley window. But when I tried to follow suit, after fighting my way to the window where I got hung up on a nail, she nearly wore out the seat of my pants. But that was better than getting biffed on the bean. For was she ever muscular! Oh, baby! Moreover her aim was almost perfect. And a fellow's head, as everybody knows, isn't anything to monkey with.

"I'll teach you," she screeched, continuing the lively tattoo on my squirming rear end, "to make fun of me in your insulting newspaper. Take that, you impudent little snip, and *that* and *that* and *that.*"

Crazy people get all kinds of queer ideas in their jumbled heads. So this notion of hers that we had featured her in our funny column wasn't anything to be wondered at. But how unlucky for poor me that she had singled out the Editor-in-Chief for her attack! Certainly,

I told myself, wondering how long the umbrella would hold out (and mighty thankful that it wasn't a barrel stave!), Editor-in-Grief was a far more appropriate title for me just now than Editor-in-Chief. But I didn't blame Red, the newspaper's original head, for my present hard luck. He had gotten me into the mess, of course. But somehow I had the depressed feeling that his circumstances were even worse than mine.

Having darted into the alley, Scoop, in his quick-witted way, grabbed me by the neck and dragged me through the window, ripping my pants from top to bottom, which, though, I hastily told him, was nothing to worry about. For what is a pair of pants when a fellow's life is in danger?

Then, the battle having subsided, so to speak, the leader and I ventured inside to help administer to the maimed and fallen, finding cats tied to door knobs, chair legs, chandeliers and everything else.

Standing in the middle of the room, with yowling cats parked all around him, Peg's face, as he turned to us, was a study.

"What in the Sam Hill are we going to do with them?" he screeched above the racket.

"With what?" I inquired dizzily, jabbing a pair of fingers into my suffering ears as one of the champion yodelers put on an imitation

of a peppy buzz saw chewing its way through a stack of old tin cans.

"The cats, of course," he further screeched.

"Why worry about them?" I shrugged, only too glad that Mrs. Goliath herself had disappeared. "For they don't belong to us."

"Oh, is that so?" he let out a roar. "Evidently you didn't get the drift of the old girl's final remarks."

"Did Bill Hadley take her away in the crazy wagon?" I inquired eagerly.

Peg gave a queer laugh, to drown which the four-legged buzz saw worked harder than ever. Beautiful stuff, all right, for people with strong nerves and thick eardrums.

"We were all wrong, Jerry, when we thought she was cuckoo."

"But why did she sock me?" I suffered another attack of dizziness.

"Because you're the Editor-in-Chief," he grinned.

"That being the case," I spoke quickly, "here's where I resign."

Certainly, I told myself, feeling of the welts on my bean, enough was enough.

"But you can't resign," Scoop put in. "For Red appointed you; and you've got to stay appointed until we find him."

"Then get Lindbergh," I spoke fervently, "or someone else with speed."

"What you need," grinned Scoop, "is a bodyguard."

"Or a suit of armor," I tacked on gloomily.

Peg examined the bumps on my head.

"Shucks!" he grunted. "There isn't a one there as big as a hen's egg."

I felt like socking him.

"You certainly are a comfort to old age," I glowered.

"How's your neck?" he then inquired.

I worked it.

"Kind of stiff," I told him.

"But what about the cats?" Scoop put in anxious-like. "Why did the old girl leave them here?"

Peg laughed.

"They're ours, I tell you."

"*Ours?*" squawked the leader, staring.

"That's the dope," Peg waggled.

I noticed then that all of the loose cats had been taken away. And slowly the truth of the situation began to percolate into my tumbled bean. The cat advertisement that we had printed in our newspaper was a fake. Not Miss Piny Poole herself, but undoubtedly some smart neighbor woman who looked with superior disgust upon the houseful of cats and their untidy owner, had supplied the advertisement, we, in turn, printing it in perfectly good faith.

Here it is as I later cut it out of the newspaper and pasted it in my scrapbook:

WANTED—A scrubbing brush and twenty-seven more cats. Please rush. Miss Piny Poole, 222 Beech Street.

Gosh! We should have known when the advertisement was received that it was a fake. For no one would advertise for a scrubbing brush, not even a foolish old maid who kept a houseful of cats.

And how slick she had worked us, letting on, until she had spotted me as the newspaper's head, that her sole purpose in coming here was to show her treasured cats the inside of an editorial sanctum. I even had suspected her of wanting to put her arm around me, little dreaming, as she closed in on me, her real feelings still concealed by that simpering smile of hers, that she was getting set to sock me instead.

We were interrupted then by the heavy entrance of the marshal himself. And did he ever look ugly! Wough!

"So it's true, huh?" he growled, squinting at the cats.

"What?" I inquired, further upset by his unexpected appearance.

"That you've bin usin' the advertisin' columns of your newspaper to perpetrate jokes on innocent people."

SHE NEARLY WORE OUT THE SEAT OF MY PANTS.

"Oh, go lay an egg," I told him wearily, having, so to speak, reached the end of my endurance.

"Smart, hain't you?" he glared at me. "But let me tell you something, sonny: If any more complaints are registered ag'inst you an' these other newspaper birds that you flock around with, there's goin' to be a nice little party down to the local calaboose. Do you git me?"

"But it wasn't our fault, Bill," cried Scoop, kind of desperate-like. "We didn't know that the advertisement was a fake."

"Humph! A likely story."

"Did Miss Poole tell you where she got these cats?" Scoop looked around.

"As I understand it, people has bin luggin' cats to her from all over town."

The leader and I exchanged glances.

"The power of advertising," he gave a crazy laugh.

"Yes," Bill swung in viciously, "an' you guys'll feel the power of the law, too, an' I don't mean maybe, if you pull another stunt like this."

"But we don't want the cats," I cried. "So why don't you make Miss Poole lug them home and take care of them?"

"Why should she?" Bill fired back at me. "She never advertised fur 'em. You're the guys who did that. She took her own cats home. I jest saw her in the street an' had a

talk with her. These are your cats. An' I want to tell you somethin' more, bright eyes: Now that you've got 'em I'm goin' to make it my business to see that you take care of 'em. Fur on top of bein' marshal," he puffed out his chest, "I happen to be the local humane officer, too."

With which closing remark he turned his broad back on us and stomped out of the room.

"The king!" cried Scoop, posing.

"And I used to think I liked him," Peg turned up his nose.

"Me, too," I chimed in, with similar feelings.

"What did you do to him, Jerry?" Scoop regarded me curiously.

"Oh," I shrugged, "he got sore this morning when I razzed him about the vanished totem pole."

"Which reminds me," said Peg, looking kind of worried-like, "that we ought to be out searching for the pole. But I don't know how we'll ever find time to do it with these blamed cats on our hands."

"How many are there?" I tried to count them.

"Twenty-two."

"Anyway," I clutched my head, "we ought to be thankful, I suppose, that it isn't twenty-three. For then we *would* be out of luck."

"Shucks!" shrugged Scoop. "Don't worry about the cats. For, believe me, they'll make

swell premiums when we get them cleaned up."

"Meaning which?" Peg inquired quickly.

"One cat," laughed Scoop, "with each three months' subscription."

"If this is a sample of newspaper work," I put in exhausted-like, "I'd hate to make a three months' job of it."

"Well, then, let's cut it down to monthly subscriptions."

"And where will we be at the end of the month?" I sort of anticipated our own fate.

Peg laughed.

"In jail probably."

"And they tell about the freedom of the press!" Scoop laughed in turn.

"Can't we do something to get on the good side of Bill?" I spoke desperately.

"We might publish his life's history," suggested Scoop.

"Yah," I shot back, as my hair began to rise, "and if we got his picture upside down, or something, we'd be worse off than ever."

Peg, as pressman, pretended indignation.

"If you're hinting around that I don't know my business—" he began.

"One time we had our doubts," laughed Scoop. "But after that handbill job we're convinced that you're perfection itself."

"By the way," said Peg. "Did I tell you that the magician gave me eight comps?"

"Hot dog!" cried Scoop, as the pasteboards

were flipped into sight. "Now we can lock up the print shop this afternoon and go to the show."

"We might better put in our time hunting for Red," I spoke pointedly.

"All right," grinned Scoop, in a particularly jolly mood. "We'll let you do the hunting while Peg and I take our best girls to the matinée."

" 'Ow about me?" Rory spoke from the doorway, having gone home to doctor up his skinned nose with pink courtplaster. "Don't Hi get in on it?"

"Hi should 'ope so," mimicked Scoop.

But Rory was too busy staring at the cats to be offended. And then, the situation having been explained to him, I wish you could have seen his face when we further told him to take the cats out in the back room and give them a bath, preparatory to starting our new subscription campaign.

"But whatever you do," cautioned Scoop, "don't get soap in their eyes. For if Bill found out that we did a thing like that he'd fine us ten bucks."

"Which reminds me," said Peg, "that we have ten bucks coming."

"We'll collect it after the show," Scoop spoke confidently.

Then, as the noon whistles blew, we decided to knock off and get some dinner.

"Hi never washed a cat in all my life," Rory confided to me on the way home. " 'Ow do you do it?"

"It's easy," I kidded him, "if you have a rubber washboard."

"A rubber washboard?" he repeated, staring at me. "Hi never 'eard of such a thing."

"What?" I stared back at him, keeping a straight face. "Do you mean to tell me that you never heard of a rubber washboard? Well! Well! Well!"

His eyes were dancing now.

"Say, Jerry," he spoke eagerly, "did you ever 'ear the story of the three 'oles?"

"The three 'oles?" I repeated, searching his face.

"You know what Hi mean," he made a diagram of it with his hands. "A 'ole in the ground. See?"

"The story of the three 'oles, huh?" I grinned. "Let's hear it."

"Well! Well! Well!" he yipped, making a break for his front porch before I could sock him a good one.

A swell little kid, all right, I told myself, hurrying up my own porch steps, the ragged overalls that I had worn home over my torn pants sort of slopping around my ankles.

CHAPTER XIII

IMPENDING ODORS

"For heaven's sake!" Mother threw up her hands, when she got her eyes on me. "Whose rag bag did you crawl out of?"

"Old Cassibaum's," I grinned.

"Are those his overalls?" she further questioned, making a wry face.

"Sure thing," I told her, strutting around the kitchen.

"You certainly are a sight! Whatever possessed you to come home looking like that?"

And then, when I showed her my ripped pants, which in themselves explained my use of the ragged overalls, she was more upset than ever.

But the louder she scolded the broader I grinned. For a fellow doesn't mind a scolding if he deserves it. Besides, I know Mother! There isn't anybody in the whole world that she thinks as much of, or would do as much for, as me. She lets on sometimes that I'm a holy terror. But down in her heart she thinks that I'm all right. I think she's all right, too. And watching my chance I gave her a big

smack halfway between the kitchen sink and the ice box.

"Laws-a-me!" she threw her arms around me. "How any family can get along without a dirty-faced boy to scold and worry over and patch for and love is more than I can figure out," she said.

Dad came in and surprised us.

"Hey!" he gave me a swat with his folded newspaper. "What do you mean, you young squirt, hugging my wife?"

Then, as we sat down to dinner, he told me something that literally lifted me off my chair. Early the preceding evening old Cassibaum and three other "fogged" inmates of the county infirmary had made their escape. Nor had anything been seen of them since, though it was generally supposed by the guards, who were conducting a quiet search in the neighborhood, that the runaways had headed for Tutter, old Cassibaum himself acting as leader.

There was an indignant cry from Mother as I dribbled gravy all over the clean tablecloth. But I was too excited to notice a little thing like that. And having solved the mystery of the vanished totem pole (to my own satisfaction) I tore out of the house like a shot.

Scoop and I collided at the corner of Main and Elm streets.

"For the love of mud!" he yipped, staring

at me. "What kind of an evil fate is chasing you, anyhow?"

I told him, in panting sentences, about old Cassibaum's escape and its probable bearing on the hitherto puzzling mystery. No wonder, I said, that we had been unable to satisfactorily and sensibly explain the pole's sudden disappearance. For it had been carried away by a bunch of nuts, chief among them the cuckoo printer himself. And now, very probably, I drew on my imagination, they were erecting it in some secluded ravine; or, having already erected it, were doing homage to its red-headed king.

"And you think that Red is still sitting on top of it?" gasped Scoop, dazed by the startling theory, as I had shoved it at him so unexpectedly.

"Why not?" was my quick comeback, further explaining that the story had been told to Dad in confidence by the leader of the guards, who had been instructed to conduct the search secretly so as not to alarm the countryside.

"Gee-miny crickets!" the leader's eyes almost fell out of his head. "I believe you're right, Jerry."

"I know I'm right," I spoke with conviction. "It's as plain as A-B-C."

"But four men couldn't have carried the pole very far," Scoop sort of twisted the theory around in his head to make sure that we

weren't running off on a wild-goose chase.

"Men like that," I declared, "have double strength."

The leader gave an uneasy shrug.

"So much the worse for Red, huh, if they decide to make a burnt offering of him?"

"Evidently," I reviewed the probable situation in my mind, "he must have been convinced of his own safety, or he wouldn't have skinned out with them."

"By George!" came the quick exclamation. "That gives me a thought, Jerry. I bet a cookie that he hired them to do it. For, of course, if the pole disappeared he'd then be relieved of the job of sitting on it. See? And you know yourself that he was ready to quit last night, only his pride wouldn't let him. Leave it to that kid," the leader wound up, "to find a way out of his predicaments."

Yes, sir, we had the right dope now. Absolutely and nothing else but. Old Cassibaum and his gang coming along shortly after we left, the tricky pole-sitter had dished out a lot of slick gab to them, telling them what beautiful strong backs they had and what a lot of fun it was to carry a totem pole around. Then, having thus cleverly engineered the pole's disappearance, he had returned to the house for his raincoat, probably snickering up his sleeve at us as he slipped in and out of the back door.

And I had been worrying about him all

morning! The little snip! He ought to have that tricky freckled mug of his pushed through the back of his head, I told myself angrily, as we hurriedly picked up Peg and Rory, who, as you can imagine, when the situation had been explained to them, were fully as excited as we were.

Strangely, though, we could find no trace of the vanished pole-sitter when we searched the ravines and gulleys on the edge of town. Nor had any suspicious-looking men been seen in that neighborhood. So at two o'clock we abandoned the search, sick and disgusted with the whole mess. Red could paddle his own canoe from now on, we grimly agreed. Nor did we particularly care what happened to him. In fact, we kind of hoped that something perilous would happen to him—something, I mean, that would give him a good scare, and thus teach him a lesson.

Having heard about the coming afternoon show, the Tutter kids soon began to streak it for Clark's Hall, in front of which, on the broad sidewalk, was a big crate of rabbits, placed there, of course, to attract attention and thus arouse added interest in the two scheduled performances.

"It isn't what I'd call the best kind of advertising," said Scoop, squinting thoughtful-like at the cottontails as they hopped around inside their cage. "For having seen them out

here the kids certainly won't think there's anything magical about them when old doo-funny later pulls them out of grandpa's whiskers, and so on."

"Hi wonder if they're 'ares," Rory bent over the cage.

" 'Ares!" hooted Peg.

"They look like 'ares to me."

"We call them rabbits in this country," grinned Scoop.

"Hi wish Hi owned a pair of them," the words were spoken longingly.

"Well," laughed Scoop, pointing to a sign, "there's your chance."

" 'Ot dog!" cried Rory, when he learned, from the sign, that six of the rabbits were going to be given away that afternoon to volunteer stage helpers. And getting his pass he darted up the stairs, at the top of which the thin-faced showman had stationed old Caleb Obed to collect tickets.

It struck me that the magician looked kind of sour when we met him in the doorway, and I began to wonder, as we picked out choice front seats, Rory having disappeared behind the curtain, if we were liable to have trouble collecting our bill. Still, I told myself, getting set to enjoy the show, there was no use crossing bridges until we came to them.

And, bu-lieve me, that was some show, all right. One of the best of its kind that I ever

saw. Nor was the clever magician, as he flitted here and there in a swallow-tailed coat, any more of an attraction than little old Rory himself.

"And where, might I ask, were you born?" the entertainer inquired of his willing assistant, when the latter appeared on the stage.

"In Hengland," said Rory.

"Where?" the magician leaned forward, hopeful, of course, of getting another laugh from the youthful audience.

"Hengland," repeated Rory, giving us a kind of uncomfortable look out of the corner of his eye as he spotted us in the front row. For he knew, all right, what the kids were laughing at.

"Louder," prompted the magician.

"*Hengland!*" the word was boomed out.

And if you think that hallful of kids didn't yip their heads off, you should have been there to hear the crazy racket. Which, of course, was fine and dandy from the showman's standpoint.

"Were you born in a castle?" he followed up.

"No," Rory shook his head. "Hi was born in a 'ouse."

"A 'ouse, eh?" smiled the entertainer. "Let's hear you spell it."

"Spell what?" Rory looked dumb.

" 'Ouse."

"H-o-u-s-e, 'ouse."

"And now let us hear you spell hippopotamus," the magician brought the little comedy to a climax.

Rory almost fainted.

"There's two 'P's' in it," said he, scratching his head.

"Well, let's hear you spell it."

"H-i-p, 'ip, p-o, 'ippo, p-o-t, 'ippopot, a, 'ippopota, m-u-s, 'ippopotamus."

"Splendid," praised the entertainer, when the laughter had subsided. "And now let us see what a boy usually carries in his pockets. Ah-ha! An egg. I wonder if it's hard-boiled. Would you mind if I tried it on your head?"

"What's the matter with your own 'ead?" was Rory's clever comeback. "Isn't it 'ard enough?"

"And another egg," the magician emptied the younger one's pockets, "and another and still another. My dear lad! Have you been running around with the chickens?"

The eggs, of course, never had come out of Rory's pockets. We knew that. The magician had a supply of them up his sleeves. It surprised us, though, that he could hide so many of them. For he piled at least three dozen of them in Rory's arms. And did we ever laugh when the eggs, in spite of all that their holder could do to prevent it, began falling to the floor, where a rubber cloth had been spread to receive them, the whole thing, you see, having

been carefully arranged ahead of time, as is true of all magical tricks.

We thought, of course, that Rory, thus thrown into close contact with the magician, would collect the ten bucks due us. But when he joined us after the show all he could talk about was the pair of " 'ares" that the entertainer had promised him if he'd come back that night and do some more spelling.

So we tackled the proprietor ourselves, when he came out of the hall. And what do you know if he didn't give us the horselaugh, telling us that our printing wasn't worth any more than the eight comps that he had contributed.

And in accepting the comps Peg had thought that we were getting something free!

"Look here, fish-face," old hefty stood his ground. "You'll either pay us that ten bucks or we'll take it out of your hide."

"How dramatic!" the old crook further ridiculed us, thinking, of course, that he could easily get the best of four boys.

"We're waiting," Peg spoke grimly.

"Waiting for what?" came the pleasant inquiry.

"Our ten bucks."

"Well," the magician continued his pleasant manner, "would you mind waiting outside, like good little boys? For it's time now to lock up the hall. And surely you wouldn't want me to miss my supper at the hotel."

"You're liable to miss some of those cute little face ornaments of yours," was Peg's angry threat, "if you don't cough up that ten bucks."

"What a compliment to my genius!" the sleight-of-hand performer beamed. "But, really, my dear boy, you overrate my talents in asking me to cough up real money. I can produce rabbits from empty hats, and, if necessary, hats from empty rabbits. But the art of coughing up money is something I never have mastered. And this humiliating admission having been wrung from me, as it were, I would regard it as a great favor if you would now step aside, as requested, so that I can lock the door."

Certainly, we concluded, depressed by our hard luck, there was no use arguing with a bird like that. So we trailed off in the direction of the print shop, determined to lay for him that night after the show and knock the tar out of him. We might never get our ten bucks, for if we took it away from him, after we got him down, he might accuse us of robbing him. But we'd have the satisfaction of knowing that we had put some cute little black-and-blue designs on the front of his mug.

"Don't you do it," cried Rory, with frightened eyes, when he heard our plans. "For 'e carries a gun. Hi saw it."

Which settled *that*. For however eager we

were for revenge we didn't care to run the chance of getting plugged with bullets. Still, as the leader said, there ought to be some way of getting even with the old cheat.

" 'Ow about some rotten heggs?" said Rory.

"Meaning which?" said Scoop quickly.

"You saw those heggs that Hi dropped on the floor. Well, 'e's got more on hand to use to-night. Hi saw them. And how lovely, 'uh, if we could work in some rotten heggs on 'im."

"Oh, baby!" cried Scoop, with dancing eyes. "That's what I call a million-dollar suggestion, Rory. So look pretty while we line up and kiss you."

" 'Elp!" squawked the flower of Hengland, when we started to mess him around. "If you want to kiss somebody go kiss Miss Poole."

Which reminded us that the cat woman's liberal contribution to our thriving business hadn't as yet had their dinner. And unwilling to see them suffer we sent over to the creamery for six quarts of skimmed milk, later tying the yodelers in the back room.

"I thought Rory was going to primp them up?" said Peg, while Scoop was telephoning to his father to learn if the farmers, with whom Mr. Ellery dealt, had brought in any rotten eggs lately.

" 'Ow can Hi wash cats and take part in shows, too?" Rory made excuses.

"Just the same," waggled Peg, "the cats

have got to be cleaned up before they go to bed to-night. Just look at them! That one with the cross eyes even has soup on its whiskers."

"Do Hi 'ave to shave them, too?" grinned Rory, who had found out, I guess, that my earlier "rubber-washboard" talk was a lot of boloney.

"We'll let Jerry do that," laughed Peg.

And if you have read my *Prancing Pancake* book you probably know *why* he laughed. Gosh! I sure made a fool of myself that time.

Scoop came tearing out of the editorial room.

"We're all set, fellows," he cried. "Pa says he's got a crate of eggs in the basement that he dassn't even handle for fear he'll get gassed to death."

"Tra-la-la-la-la!" sang Peg, as we locked the print shop and started jauntily down the street. "I have a hunch that old fish-face is going to have the hall all to himself to-night after the egg trick."

"Let's 'ope," shrugged Rory, whose scheme it was to dump the rotten eggs on the magician's feet, "that Hi can get away from him before 'e grabs me."

"How about the audience?" I laughed. "Maybe they'll do some grabbing when they get a whiff of the eggs."

"If they grab anybody," predicted Peg, "it'll be old fish-face himself."

"My only regret is," said Scoop, as we came

within sight of his father's store, "that we can't drive the people away before he collects their money."

" 'E may have to give the money back," said Rory, who, of course, had now lost all hope of getting a pair of " 'ares," "if Bill 'Adley 'appens along."

"And what will Bill do to us," I gave an uneasy laugh, "if he finds out the truth about the rotten eggs?"

"Even if we do get locked up in the calaboose," joked Peg, "there'll be no lack of excitement. For Bill promised us a party. And I'm simply daffy over parties."

After which, having gotten the needed eggs, we hurried over to Clark's Hall and climbed the fire escape to the flat roof, Rory causing a near panic in the new Chinese laundry when he accidentally dropped one of the eggs through the lower building's open skylight.

CHAPTER XIV

GREEN GOGGLES

One time when the chesty high-school seniors were putting on a class play in Clark's Hall, which is the nearest thing we have to a real opera house, the freshies, to even old scores, dropped a whole flock of setting hens onto the stage through an opening in the roof. A very touching love scene was being enacted at the time, with the sleek-haired sheik of the cast appropriately dishing out his burning lines on bended knees. But he forgot all about his fervid love-making and everything else having to do with his part when one of the squawking egg layers fluttered out of the "sky" and socked its toenails into the back of his manly neck as he bent to kiss the fair maiden's hand.

The clever trick was recalled to my mind as we now headed for the same roof scuttle that had served the clever freshies so well that memorable night. And I wondered, as we disappeared in turn through the rectangular opening, if our intended trick would be as successful. But how unlucky for us, was my further uneasy thought, if the magician, human snake that he

was, and probably versed in all kinds of crookedness, bobbed up in front of us when we landed at the foot of the wall ladder behind the stage.

Which, though, I'm happy to say, was needless apprehension on my part. For the only thing that hopped into sight, when we reached the foot of the ladder, was a friendly white rabbit.

"There they are," Rory pointed to the showman's basket of eggs, quickly taking the rabbit to his heart.

Scoop got busy.

"An even exchange is no robbery," he quoted, deftly unloading the contents of one basket into the other.

Peg held one of the rotten eggs to his nose.

"Holy cow!" he gagged, acting faint. "I can smell the blamed thing clear through its porcelain overcoat."

"For 'eaven's sake don't drop it," yipped Rory, looking scared.

"Yes," Scoop quickly reached for the egg, acting kind of uneasy himself, "let's have it." And getting it he put it on the top of the magician's filled basket.

"What are you going to do with the good eggs?" I then inquired curiously.

"Take them over to the print shop and stir up some kind of a fancy dish for the cats."

"A pussycat omelet, 'uh?" grinned Rory.

"And why not?" the leader grinned in turn.

Peg looked around at the rows of empty seats.

"Boy," he laughed, "there's going to be a panic here to-night when those fragrant antiques kiss the floor at the magician's feet."

"Maybe we ought to warn our own parents," I spoke anxiously, thinking of Mother. For certainly I didn't want anything unpleasant to happen to her. And I could readily imagine how sick she'd be if she got a whiff of the smashed hen fruit.

But I was quickly reminded by my companions that this was the regular meeting night of the Golden Rule Card Club, notice of which had been printed in our newspaper. And confident that all of our parents would attend the scheduled party, a neighborhood event, we decided to keep the rotten-egg trick to ourselves. For, as Peg said, once a story like that got into circulation, even at home, it could very easily cause a fellow trouble.

Surrounded by the magician's gaudy stage furniture I saw now what a complete sham the stuff was. And more than ever I feared the tricky man who had created the false pieces.

"Let's beat it," I spoke uneasily, eager to get away.

"All right," consented Scoop, sauntering across the stage with the egg basket on his arm. "Come on, gang."

But when we started down the fire escape, after having climbed the wall ladder to the flat roof, Peg, who was in the lead as usual, quickly motioned us back.

There was a man on the fire escape, he told us excitedly.

"Not the magician!" Scoop's eyes popped out of his head.

"Looks more like Bill Hadley to me," Peg spoke uneasily.

Bill Hadley!

"Suffering cats!" I squawked, as a picture rose in my mind of a cute little room with an iron door and steel bars on the windows. For that's where I'd land, all right, as I very well knew, if Bill got his mitts on me.

But the leader's quick wits saved the day for all of us.

"Even if the laundryman did squeal on us," he thus accounted for the marshal's appearance on the scene, "Bill can't prove that we dropped the rotten egg through the skylight unless he catches us."

After which, as you can imagine, there was a grand rush for the roof scuttle. Only this time, as we scrambled down the wall ladder, our only means of escape, Peg came last, lowering the scuttle to place behind him. And having landed safely at the foot of the ladder we quickly crawled under a pile of old scenery,

where we lay, face downward, on the dirty floor.

"Do you suppose he'll come down the ladder?" I inquired of Peg, as footsteps sounded on the roof.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised," old hefty spoke in a guarded voice.

"But don't let it worry you, Jerry," Scoop put in reassuringly. "For he'll never find us in this dusty hole."

"Oop!" gurgled Rory, as he lay between me and the leader.

"What's the big idea, ambitious?" grunted Peg. "Are you trying to heave up your stomach?"

But Rory's only answer was another mushy "Oop!"

"Find out how he does it, Jerry. I'd like to learn."

"Hi don't do it," the human volcano spoke for himself, suffering another violent eruption. "It just does hitself."

"What's the matter with you anyway?" Peg inquired impatiently, fearful of what might happen if the nonsense continued.

" 'Eecups," gurgled Rory, sounding for all the world as though he was trying to turn inside out.

Then, as the scuttle hinges creaked over our heads, followed by the sound of scraping foot-

steps on the ladder, we held our breath, the "'eecupper" included, all hoping for the best.

To our great relief, though, and mounting amazement, the newcomer, as we got a squint at him through the ragged scenery when he arrived at the foot of the ladder, wasn't the expected arm of the law at all, but a total stranger to us. And queerest of all he wore a pair of huge green goggles.

Men don't dress up in things like that without a purpose. And I was convinced, too, as I watched the newcomer's stealthy movements, that he had an added purpose in coming here so mysteriously. It wasn't anything concerning us, though. I was dead sure of that. For he seemed totally unconscious of the fact that he was being watched.

Green goggles! Suddenly my mind jumped back to the morning of the jeweler's hasty flight. Already dressed when we rapped on his front door, he had asked us, in a peculiar frightened manner, following our entrance, if we had seen any strangers in the neighborhood. Moreover, he had particularly mentioned a man in green goggles, which was the thing that stirred up my present excitement.

For here we were sort of sitting in the front row, as it were, while another green-goggled geezer (or more probably the same one) systematically ransacked the magician's stuff! Peculiarly, though, the mysterious searcher

took nothing. And his evident failure to find the particular thing of which he was in search noticeably angered him.

Who was he? What was he searching for? And why had the jeweler been so upset over his presence in the neighborhood? These and other similar questions jumped into my mind as I followed the searcher's further movements, my detective instincts now fully aroused.

Then, as the prowler got his eyes on the basket of eggs, he gave a peculiar pleased cry. But here, too, having closely examined both the eggs and the basket itself, he seemed to meet with defeat. Which is as far as I need to describe his mystifying movements. For just then, after a masterful silence, Rory heaved up a combination gurgle and squeal that would have done credit to an elephant suffering with the green-apple colic.

Had a bomb exploded at his feet the searcher couldn't have been more startled. Wheeling, he gave a cry that reminded me for all the world of a trapped animal. And when I tell you that he dropped the basket of rotten eggs on the floor I guess you can see, without any elaboration on my part, what a terrible fix we were in.

Man, oh, man, did those eggs ever stink! Some people think that Limburger cheese is the limit. And I've seen others turn up their noses at sauerkraut. But Limburger and sauer-

kraut, let me tell you, even when taken at their worst, couldn't have put up a two-minute fight against the gooey, billowy, overpowering odor that galloped, like destruction itself, through that stricken old hall.

Just as in the case of disastrous shipwrecks and similar catastrophies, it was every man for himself now. And tumbling out of our hiding place we sort of clawed and fought our way to the ladder, the stink clouds rolling in on us from all sides, seemingly determined to down us in our tracks. I have a faint recollection of seeing the defeated searcher scoot up the ladder like a frantic monkey. But he was nowhere in sight, either on the roof or in the lower alley, when we started down the fire escape.

The stinking smell seemed to follow us. So we sensibly avoided the main streets. And having safely reached the print shop we quickly shed our clothes, hanging them in front of an electric fan in the back room. Then, having mixed up a tubful of strong suds, we scrubbed our naked bodies from head to foot. In time we got rid of the fearful smell. But when we came to check up on the cats we found that three of the poor creatures had been gassed to death.

By this time the whole street was aroused. And having traced the overpowering smudge-like odor to its source, the merchants in the

vicinity of Clark's Hall, convinced that something was burning, turned in a fire alarm. Then down the street came the excited magician himself. We saw him dart up the stairs and unlock the door through which the summoned firemen later dragged their hose cart. And when it was learned that the supposed smudge was nothing more than a mess of rotten eggs, the language around the hall was almost as bad as the smell itself.

"Yes, yes," the magician admitted, acting as though he was at his wit's end. "They're my eggs, of course. And evidently they fell from that table. But really, gentlemen, I had no idea that they were rotten. So you shouldn't blame me."

Carried into the hall by the curious crowd that flocked to the scene, we kept our eyes peeled for the mysterious stranger. But he was nowhere in sight. And more than ever, as I listened to the ruck-a-tuck between the upset magician and the angry firemen, I wondered who the goggle wearer was and what he had been searching for in the supposedly empty hall. Had he seen us come down the fire escape? And having thus identified us would we hear from him later on? I kind of hoped so. For I wanted to solve the mystery that surrounded him. And I wondered, too, in a vague way, if I wouldn't find that the mystery involved the jeweler, himself a man of known

odd characteristics and very queer activities.

The magician tried his best to ventilate the hall. But only a few kids ventured inside that night when he attempted to give the second scheduled performance. So, disgusted, he packed up his stuff and loaded it into a truck that he used for that purpose. Nor did the suspect, as we watched him from the background, our own plans having been upset, yet convinced that everything had happened for the best, that he would have been saved all this grief, and also would have been money ahead, if he had played fair with us.

Peg gave Rory a jab in the ribs.

"Why don't you step up to him and demand your 'ares?"

"Yes," was Rory's quick retort, "and why don't you step hup to 'im and demand our ten bucks?"

"I'd be ashamed to take it," admitted Peg, with a queer laugh, "after what happened."

"It wasn't our fault that the eggs got upset before the show," Scoop put in quickly. "You can blame that on old Green Goggles."

"But what was there about the basket of eggs to attract his attention in the first place?" I puzzled, thinking of the prowler.

"That's the mystery," waggled Scoop.

"He seemed peculiarly interested in the basket, too," Peg put in.

"We may never find out what he was search-

ing for," said Scoop, kind of thoughtful-like. "But it's a cinch he was searching for something."

"Maybe old fish-face could put us wise," laughed Peg.

"Yah," jeered Scoop, "you better go over and ask him."

Green Goggles! Was he a jewel thief? Certainly, I told myself, as I turned the mystery over in my mind, that would explain old Kasper's fear of him. But granting that the scheming prowler had been seen and recognized, why hadn't the jeweler reported him to the police? Could it be, too, I further theorized, that the thief had spotted the magician's diamond ring? And was that the object of his secret search? But why should a thief interested in diamond rings give such peculiar attention to a basket of eggs? That's what got me.

Unwilling to pass up any lead that might throw a ray of light on the mystery, I even wondered if the goggle wearer wasn't one of the escaped inmates, to whom we credited the totem-pole's disappearance. But I quickly dismissed that thought. For the jeweler evidently had seen the prowler several days ago. And it was only within the past twenty-four hours that the infirmary inmates, under old Cassibaum's leadership, had made their escape.

CHAPTER XV

A GENERAL MIX-UP

The magician having left town with his loaded truck, we returned to the print shop, where, to our surprise, we shortly received a long-distance call from Cleveland, Ohio.

It was old Cassibaum's sister. But she talked so fast and so excited-like that I couldn't make out what she said. So, in despair, I finally turned the telephone over to Scoop.

"Hello!" he cried into the mouthpiece. "What's that? Yes, this is the *Times* office. They took him away last Wednesday. What's that? See the superintendent? But that won't be necessary, Mrs. Darbin, for he made his escape last night. Not that I know of. *What? Hide* him? Well, if my chums will help me I'll do the best I can. But you needn't— I say if my chums will help me I'll do the best I can. Four of us. What's that? Monday morning? Did you say Monday or Sunday? Yes, I understand you now. Good-by."

And then did *we* ever stare when the leader, after hanging up the receiver, told us that the printer's wealthy sister, having just been in-

formed of her brother's escape, wanted us to find him and hide him until she could arrive on the scene to take care of him. There was nothing seriously wrong with his mind, she declared. He always had acted queer, and others in the family ahead of him. It was a family trait.

"But why did she telephone from Cleveland?" inquired Peg, recalling that our telegram had been sent to Detroit.

"Because that's where she's living now, which explains why our telegram was so long reaching her. Ashamed to have it said that a brother of hers had ever been in the poorhouse, she asked me at first to go over there and beg the superintendent to release him. Then, learning that he had escaped, she promptly offered to pay me a hundred dollars if I'd find him and hide him until she got here, even promising to back me with her last dollar (and I guess she has a wad of them) if I got into trouble."

"And you're really going to accept her offer?" Peg inquired, quickly searching the leader's face.

"Why not?" the latter questioned in turn. "For I can't think of an easier way of earning a hundred dollars," he added with a grin.

" 'Ow about us?" Rory put in quickly. "What do we get out of it?"

"The same as I do."

The smaller one's eyes almost popped out of his head.

"Not a 'undred dollars apiece?" he yipped, staring.

"That's her promise," nodded Scoop.

Peg looked dizzy.

"If you were to ask me," said he, "I'd say that she's even crazier than old Cassy himself."

"She admitted that queerness is a family trait," grinned Scoop. "And on top of that she was fearfully worked up, which may account for her unusual generosity. But I've given her my promise. So we better get busy."

"But how about the newspaper?" I put in. Certainly, I told myself, if we turned detectives we couldn't very well run a newspaper, too.

"Why look at me?" laughed Scoop. "You're the Editor-in-Chief."

"But I can't run the newspaper all alone," I yipped back at him.

"I've got it!" he cried, with dancing eyes. "We'll find old Cassibaum. See? And having dressed him up in women's clothes—he has a whole trunkful of that junk, wigs included—we'll let him do the work in the back room while we take it easy in the office."

Rory fell limply into a chair.

"But what if we get caught?" I cried, thinking of Bill.

"Didn't I just tell you," an added sparkle came into the leader's eyes, "that Mrs. Darbin

THE MAGICIAN LEFT TOWN WITH HIS LOADED TRUCK.

gave me her promise that she'd spend her last dollar on me if I got hung up? And, of course, that includes you, too."

I saw then that he was kidding.

"Just the same," he spoke earnestly, "I think it's our duty to find the printer, if we can, and help him. For I told her that we would. And a promise is a promise, especially when given to a woman. She expects to get here in her car sometime Sunday afternoon or early Monday morning, so we won't have him on our hands very long. And, of course, once she has arrived the responsibility will be hers."

"And you really think she'll pay us a 'undred dollars apiece?" said Rory, acting as though he was afraid that he'd awaken and find he had been dreaming.

"I do, for a fact," the words were accompanied by a grave nod. "But I don't intend to let her."

The smaller one almost fainted.

"Why not?" he squawked, staring.

"Because," Scoop spoke grimly, fair and square kid that he is, "I don't care to earn money that way."

Having gotten out our initial issue on Thursday morning, as recorded, practically nothing had been done since then toward a second issue, notwithstanding Scoop's big talk about a daily. But I saw now how useless it would be to try and start a daily the coming week, even though

we had materially reduced the page size of our newspaper. For there was a limit to what four inexperienced boys could do. Besides, as I pointed out to my chums on the way home, a daily would provide six times as many chances for mistakes as a weekly. Which, in itself, ought to settle the matter. As for Mrs. Panghorn, I wound up, what if she did blat six times to our once? Certainly, our one big toot would get the most attention.

"All right," laughed Scoop, in that jolly way of his. "You're the Editor-in-Chief. Make it a weekly if you wish."

"But how about old Cassibaum?" Peg put in. "If his sister gets a pardon for him, or something, won't he be likely to take over the newspaper himself?"

"We haven't found him yet," was the way Scoop settled that point. "And until we do find him, or until his sister kicks us out (which isn't likely), Jerry's the big noise around there."

"Don't forget about the cats," joked Rory, imagining, I guess, that he could still hear them yowling for their dessert.

"Which reminds me," I turned to the leader, "that you were going to make a pussycat omelet for them."

"Get the eggs," he grinned, "and I will."

"Where are they?" I inquired.

"Over in the hall under that pile of old scenery."

"But you aren't going to leave them there?" I quickly searched his face.

"Well," he stretched himself wearily, "I certainly have no intentions of going back after them to-night."

"Who *would* want to go in that stinking old place?" Rory turned up his nose.

"Green Goggles might," I laughed, "if he knew there was another basket of eggs there."

Wanting some chewing gum I ran across the park to Mr. Wheeler's drug store, the others promising to wait for me near the big goldfish pool, the thought suddenly popping into my head, as I entered the store, that now was a good time to find out whether or not the druggist, familiarly known to his trade as "Tommy" Wheeler, intended to repeat the small "glue" advertisement that had appeared in our initial issue.

Having heard the front door open and close the proprietor came forward to wait on me, asking me sharply what I wanted.

I stared at him. For usually he's as jolly as fabled old Saint Nick himself. Moreover I've always had the feeling that he particularly liked me. His actions showed it. But, bu-lieve me, there was nothing in his face now to suggest that he liked me, or ever had.

Could it be, the sinking thought shoved itself at me, as I explored my mind for a possible reason for his sudden coolness, that we had balled up his advertisement, too?

Getting my chewing gum I loitered in the front part of the store where one of our newspapers lay on the counter. But I didn't open the newspaper right away. Instead, I waited until he was busy. And it is well for me, I think, that I did wait. For had he been standing near me when I read the garbled advertisement (the worst that I had seen yet), I actually believe that I would have keeled over, there being a limit to what a boy of my age can stand.

Suffering cats! No wonder he was peeved.

As turned over to us the advertisement (which contained the picture of a little girl mending a doll's neck) had read like this:

I Heard My
Dolly Scream

I knew she had hurt herself very badly. She had fallen from the bureau, and when I picked her up I found that her neck was broken. What to do? Le Page's glue QUICK!

Tommy Wheeler
"The Family Druggist"

and this is what we printed (having left out the picture):

I Heard My
Wife Scream For Help

I knew she had hurt herself very badly. She had fallen from the bureau, and when I picked her up I found that her neck was broken. What to do? Le Page's glue QUICK!

Tommy Wheeler

"The Homely Druggist"

Tumbling out of the store, and mighty thankful that I hadn't been kicked out, I cut a bee line for the goldfish pool, where Scoop and Peg were splashing water on Rory, who, having waded into the center of the pool, was now posing beside the fountain.

"By George!" cried old hefty, when I told him about the mess that he had made of the druggist's advertisement—another account, so to speak, that we could safely kiss good-by! "That explains where the 'fire' heading went to. It got into the druggist's advertisement by mistake. Don't you remember, Jerry? You wrote up an article that morning about old Mrs. Baldwin screeching for help from her attic window when her chimney got afire. 'Wife screams for help!' That's the heading you gave me. And in setting up the glue advertisement and fire article I accidentally got the headings mixed."

"Honest, Peg," I sweat, "if anybody in this world deserves to be hung, it's you."

For the worst part was that Mrs. Wheeler weighed even more than Aunt Pansy herself. And to have us print that junk about her "homely" husband mending her broken neck with glue! The wonder was, I told myself, as the sweat streamed down my face, that Mr. Wheeler hadn't knocked my block off. And, to that point, probably the only thing that had saved me was our earlier friendship. I made up my mind, though, to tell him just how the mix-up occurred. For I didn't want him to believe, or anybody else for that matter, that I'd intentionally make fun of his fat wife. For I think a great deal of her even though I did almost choke to death one time when she gave me a piece of pie. Which, however, was my own fault. For what I mistook for the tough lower crust was really a paper plate. And when Mother heard that I had downed it, though not without difficulty, she threatened to use a stomach pump on me.

Nor did that gummed-up advertisement complete my day's grief, so to speak. For when I got home Mother almost jerked me bald-headed, the Golden Rule card players, it seems, having gathered at the home of Mrs. Stella Larson, one of the main props of the Methodist Church, where the Golden Road Missionary Society had earlier planned to hold its regular

weekly meeting—only, through an error of Rory's in making up our forms, the Golden Road members were directed to the home of Mrs. Tillie Thumb, on Bleak Street, where the tables were all set for the customary evening's entertainment, while the card players, in turn, were misdirected to the missionary headquarters.

"I never was so embarrassed in all my life," Mother ran on, pink spots showing in her cheeks. "For there we sat like a lot of goofs, waiting for someone to deal the cards. As for Mrs. Larson, we noticed that she was peculiarly uneasy. And finally she told us outright that we'd have to excuse her as she had promised to sing the 'Gates Ajar,' or something, on the other side of town where the Golden Road Missionary Society was having its weekly meeting —though she couldn't understand, she added, looking puzzled, why the committee had decided to hold the scheduled meeting at Mrs. Tillie Thumb's house instead of at *her* house, as had been announced at the last meeting. In fact, she never knew of the change, she said, until she read about it in the newspaper. Well, I began to see then that something was wrong. Golden Rule and Golden Road! Good heavens! Like as not, I told myself, feeling sillier and more embarrassed every minute, you boys had gotten the notices switched. Then—and this is the worst part of all—who should walk in

but the minister himself. No wonder he was surprised to see *us* there! And, mind you, there I sat with two decks of cards in my lap. And right beside me sat Mrs. Biggle, in her gaudy pink lace dress, with a whole lapful of tally cards. I thought I'd sink through the floor, especially when the minister came around and shook hands with us, thinking, of course, as he beamed at us, that we had gathered there in neighborly fashion to accompany Mrs. Larson to the missionary meeting. And all the time on the other side of town Mrs. Thumb was wondering why we didn't show up with the tally cards—never having seen the notice in the paper, you know. I just got through talking with her on the telephone. And she said she almost dropped dead when Deacon Paine teetered into the house with an armful of hymn books, wondering, of course, why she had tables scattered all over the lower rooms. And when Mr. and Mrs. Ellery showed up, having had the good sense to go to the right place after all, the deacon gravely passed out the books and said that the meeting would start in the usual way by singing hymn number sixty-eight. The way Mrs. Thumb tells it is simply killing, with the Ellerys sitting there singing at the top of their voices—*Mr.* Ellery, mind you, the biggest cheat in our card club. And though your father and I laughed ourselves sick when we got home, having lost all

desire to play cards, I do feel like shaking the daylights out of you, Jerry. Why aren't you more careful? As I tell your father, it'll be a wonder if you don't get us all into trouble."

Dad was standing beside me with an ear-to-ear grin, having gotten a big kick out of the mix-up, I guess. But though I grinned myself (and who wouldn't?) I hoped with all my heart that this was the wind-up of my grief, and that happier and more encouraging things would happen to me from now on.

"You look kind of tired, Jerry," Dad spoke sympathetically.

And, bu-lieve me, I *was* tired.

"Running a newspaper is hard work," I admitted, sinking into a chair.

"Then why don't you give it up?" Mother put in quickly.

"And be a quitter?" I looked her squarely in the eye.

Which kind of hushed her up. For she knew *why* we were running the newspaper. She and that highfalutin' clique of hers had driven us into it. Nor would we stop, I told myself grimly, until we had accomplished our purpose.

Up with the totem pole!

Only, of course, was my sleepy thought, as I dragged myself up the stairs, we'd have to find the blamed thing first. And old Cassibaum, too. Which was to be our job the first thing in the morning.

CHAPTER XVI

COUSIN BELLA

When I tumbled into the print shop the following morning, the others having gotten there ahead of me, Rory met me at the door with the beaming news that the cats that supposedly had been gassed to death the preceding evening had come back to life and now were yowling merrily for their breakfast. So I wearily coughed up my share of the milk money, thankful we were feeding cats instead of elephants, after which the planned search for old Cassibaum was begun.

I took a northernly course, as directed, Peg walking with me as far as College Hill, where he turned east. But though I searched every old building that I came to, and peeked into every ravine on that side of town, I found not the slightest trace of the escaped printer. Nor were any of my chums any more successful. So, as you can imagine, it was a noticeably weary and discouraged bunch of amateur detectives that later gathered in the print shop, where, during our absence, someone had shoved an envelope containing a dollar bill and the

copy for an advertisement under our front door.

An accompanying note requested us to print the advertisement in our next regular issue, addressing all replies to post office box two hundred and one. Which, in itself, was perfectly all right. But were we ever amazed when we read the brief advertisement itself! Here it is:

WANTED TO BUY
A Wooden Indian
P. O. Box 201,
Tutter, Ill.

The Tutter people never had been able to understand old Kasper Bollan's interest in the wooden Indian that he kept in front of his jewelry store. For it seemed out of place there. And his careful handling of it as he dragged it out of his store each morning and similarly trundled it inside at night, had aroused added curious comment.

The Indian having been given to us under circumstances that both puzzled and bewildered us, as recorded, we had lugged the crazy thing over to Red's house, intending to keep it in the parlor, but had hastily decided that the adjacent barn was a much better place for it when Aunt Pansy took after us, sort of peppy-like, with a dust mop.

A lot of people had seen us drag the wooden

Indian down the street. And practically every kid in town knew that we owned it (and envied us accordingly). Why, then, was the thing that puzzled us, as we studied the advertisement, hadn't this particular box holder come to us directly if he wanted a wooden Indian, instead of wasting his money on an advertisement? Not that we weren't glad to get the business. But I dare say you grasp my point.

It would almost seem that the advertiser was someone from out of town. Yet that was mystifying in itself. And wondering now, with mounting excitement, if some peculiar secret move was under way to locate old Kasper's missing Indian, by uninformed outsiders, we lit out for the post office.

"Would you mind telling us who's holding box number two hundred and one?" Scoop inquired at the general-delivery window.

"That's Kasper Bollan's box," the requested information was quickly supplied by the trained clerk.

I thought Scoop would faint.

"*Who?*" he squeaked, staring.

"You know who I mean—the jeweler on Grant Street, who has a penchant for wooden Indians."

Yes, we knew, all right, who he meant! But we certainly couldn't understand why Kasper Bollan, however queer he was in some respects, and now secretly living in his closed store,

should be advertising for another wooden Indian after having already given one away. If he wanted his Indian back, as the advertisement suggested (for surely he must have known that there wasn't another one like it within fifty miles of us), why didn't he come out and say so instead of taking this roundabout course of begging for his truck? We didn't need the blamed thing. And if he did (or thought he did) he certainly was welcome to it, without going to all this unnecessary monkey-work.

"I wonder," Scoop advanced the startling theory, sort of picking it out of the blue sky, as it were, "if it really was old Kasper's light that Bill saw in the closed jewelry store night before last."

"Meaning which?" I inquired quickly, searching his face.

"Maybe it was Green Goggles."

Green Goggles!

"Come on," I yipped, starting down the street on the tear. But our sharp rat-a-tat-tat on the front door of the jewelry store brought no response from within. Nor did we succeed any better when we went around to the rear door.

Dealing in valuable gems, the jeweler had protected his alley windows with iron bars, which gave the aged building a sort of jail-like appearance. But none of these bars had

been disturbed, proof in itself that entrance had been made through one of the two doors.

"For two cents," said Scoop, acting kind of baffled-like, "I'd go over and tell Bill Hadley. For if the jewelry store has been robbed he ought to know about it."

"Oh, don't do that," I begged. "For we have no proof that the store has been robbed. And I dread to have Bill question us. For you know how inquisitive he is. One thing always leads to another. And if he finds out *why* old Kasper skinned out we'll get the blame."

"Jerry's right," Peg put in. "A better plan, I think, is to lay low and keep our eyes peeled. By watching this place to-night we'll soon learn who's sneaking in and out."

Scoop looked dizzy.

"I never bumped into such a crazy tangle in all my life. If it was Kasper's light that Bill saw, why did the jeweler slip that crazy advertisement under our door? For he ought to know that we'd cheerfully return his wooden Indian to him if he asked us for it. Does he want a new Indian? Is that his idea? Well, he's certainly goofy if he thinks he can pick up a thing like that in Tutter. Or, if the store has been robbed, and Green Goggles (as we call him) is the thief, why doesn't he skin out? What's his idea in advertising for a wooden Indian? Does he know that there used to be a

wooden Indian in the store? And is he trying to locate it? If so, why?"

Peg got my eye.

"You know what I told you, Jerry, the night we were searching for Red? There's something queer about that Indian. Its face shows it."

"But its face is nothing but wood," was Scoop's thoughtful comment.

"Just the same," shrugged Peg, "that's the way I feel about it."

"Suppose we go over there and take a look at the blamed thing," suggested the puzzled leader.

But when we arrived at the barn we found that someone else had been there ahead of us. The Indian's upraised wooden arm had been completely sawed off close to the shoulder. The saw (which had Mr. Meyers' name on it) lay on the floor. And we could detect particles of fresh sawdust. But the severed arm itself had completely disappeared.

Which, as you can imagine, left us more mystified than ever. For why should anybody, least of all the jeweler himself, thus mutilate a wooden statute? No, we concluded, if either of the two suspects had done it, it was Green Goggles. And everybody agreeing that the proper place to lay for the probable thief was at the jewelry store, as Peg had suggested, I eagerly looked forward to the coming dark-

ness. Nor could I, as I later went about my work in the editorial room, completely dismiss the peculiar wooden Indian from my mind, wondering if the author of the advertisement was responsible for the Indian's disfigurement. But why, I asked myself, should he advertise for the Indian if he already knew where it was?

You can see what we were up against. As Scoop had said, it was the craziest tangle that we ever had bumped into. I couldn't make head nor tail of it. Nor could I for the life of me figure out where old Cassibaum and his gang had disappeared to. For I still held to the belief that a thing as heavy as that totem pole was could never have been carried far. Yet there was not the slightest trace of it in any of the places where we had expected to find it.

But it was nothing to worry about, I told myself sensibly, as I started my "dummy" for the coming week's issue.

Then when I was jiggling the paste brush around, whistling merrily to myself, who should breeze into the room but Mrs. Pangborn, powdered and painted as usual and dressed in the height of fashion. Truly, I told myself, as I sort of leaned for support against my desk, this was an era of surprises.

Accepting the chair that I offered, the visitor gave close attention to her surroundings, showing by the curl of her nose that she didn't think

very highly of our dump. And following her scornful eyes I sort of wondered myself if it wouldn't be a good plan to get a long-handled broom some time and sort of make a raid on the cobwebs and other junk (including several wads of ancient chewing gum!) that had accumulated on the seamed ceiling during the past forty years.

"I presume," the caller finally decided to make use of her voice, speaking in that sort of frigid, uppish way of hers, "that my visit is somewhat of a surprise to you."

"Yes, ma'am," I admitted truthfully, letting her see that I, too, could be uppish in my actions. For when it came right down to brass tacks, as the saying is, I was just as much of an editor as she was. And I couldn't see the sense of letting her come in here and lord it all over me. For she was that kind.

"I tried to get you on the telephone," she further exercised her aristocratic tongue. "But no one answered."

Scoop had earlier fixed up a call bell for me, consisting of an old tomato can with a bolt hung in it. But when I started jiggling the crazy thing I thought that the visitor would fall out of her chair.

Then as Rory appeared in the doorway, wondering what had happened, I lit into him.

"Mrs. Pangborn has just informed me," I put on a good imitation of Simon Legree getting

ready to clout Uncle Tom, "that she tried to get me on the telephone this morning, but no one answered. What's the idea anyway?" I roared. "Haven't I told you before to answer the telephone when I go over to the bank? Suppose I got a call from the governor? And no answer! Why, I ought to fire you on the spot. And I would if it wasn't for your widowed mother."

Poor Rory! If I actually had popped him one on the end of his ink-spotted nose I doubt if he could have been more stunned. But he soon collected his wits. And getting his meek promise (as he struggled to keep a straight face) that he'd be more attentive to his duties in the future, I dismissed him with a sort of austere-like gesture.

None of which, of course, had escaped Mrs. Pangborn's sharp eyes.

"How very interesting," she purred, the look on her face matching her catty words.

Then to my good luck Mother called up.

"I have a notion," she spoke sharply, "to make you come home. For I told you at the breakfast table this morning to put on a clean shirt. It seems, though, that you paid not the slightest bit of attention to me. And the shirt you're wearing has a hole in it, too! What are you trying to do?—arouse public sympathy so that we'll get a donation?"

I cleared my throat in the way I had seen

Dad do when an important customer called him up on long distance to order a trainload of paving bricks.

"Um . . . I'll be very glad to hold the proposition under advisement," I spoke with dignity.

"You'll be very glad to do *what?*" squeaked Mother. And did I ever want to snicker as I pictured her sort of clawing the wall for support.

"No, no," I gravely shook my head. "I wouldn't think of selling out for less than fifty thousand dollars."

"Good heavens!" Mother gave another squeak. "Are you loony?"

"But if you're anxious to pick up a fairly good newspaper cheap," I added, "it might pay you to investigate the *Globe.*" Then I turned to the visitor. "Would you be interested in selling your little newspaper, Mrs. Pangborn?" I inquired gravely, Mother in the meantime, I guess, having fainted dead away.

The visitor's face was as red as a beet.

"Suppose," said she icily, "that we eliminate this very unnecessary buffoonery and get down to business."

"Very well," I accommodatingly hung up the receiver.

"It may be an added surprise to you to learn," she seemed to have some difficulty in approaching her subject, "that I am very much worried about your missing chum."

Surprised? Say, she'll never know how near I came to falling out of my chair! For I thought she hated kids, Red in particular.

"Have you heard anything from him?" she followed up, leaning forward in a peculiarly eager way.

"No, ma'am," I shook my head, wondering if she really was sincere or whether this apparent anxiety of hers was all put on. For she was a deep one, all right.

"And you have no idea where he is?"

"No, ma'am," I gave my head another shake.

"Nor the totem pole either?" she persisted.

"No, ma'am," I repeated for the third time, though more stiffly now. For her mention of the totem pole sort of revived unpleasant memories.

"But don't you think you ought to try and find him?" she spoke eagerly.

"We have tried."

"And you have no clue at all to his whereabouts?" she asked the same question twice, though in a slightly different way.

"Absolutely none," I shook my head again.

"I'm sorry to hear this," she got to her feet. "I—I was in hopes that I'd receive a more favorable report from you. But I'm going to hope for the best. And should you get word from him I trust that I will be afforded the courtesy of a call."

Then she screamed at the top of her voice as

sixteen highly excited cats streaked it through the room in high gear, Scoop having thoughtlessly admitted a small black poodle.

"Good heavens!" her eyes bulged. "What kind of a place is this? A menagerie?"

"The cats," I gave a grand gesture, "were presented to us by one of our very dear subscribers."

"Well," she stiffened, sort of snapping out the words, "I'm very thankful to say that *my* very dear subscribers have less bizarre tastes. Good morning."

"What did she want?" Scoop and Peg descended on me as soon as the front door had closed.

"Oh," I continued my big actions, "we were just discussing a knotty editorial problem. One of the daily burdens of our office, you know."

Scoop grabbed a dirty old feather duster from its hook on the bookcase.

"Cut it out," I squawked, as he socked me.

"Then talk sense," he ordered.

Getting my story he walked over to the open window, where he stood for several moments gazing thoughtfully into the alley.

"She didn't come here because she was worried about Red," was the conclusion he arrived at, in that kind of analytical way of his. "She was worried about herself. Mark my word, fellows," he spoke earnestly, "*she* knows more about Red's disappearance than she cares to let

on. And she's been quaking in her shoes for fear we might uncover her secret. That's why she came here this morning. She wanted to find out how much we knew."

"And you really think she hired old Cassibaum and those other goofs to carry off the totem pole?" I cried, with mounting bewilderment, as the wreckage of my own theory, so to speak, piled up around me.

"That isn't impossible," he nodded.

"I don't believe it," Peg swung in, grimmer and more dogged-like than I ever had seen him.

"Don't believe what?" the leader inquired.

"That she abducted Red, or had anything to do with his disappearance."

"I never said she abducted Red," Scoop stood his ground. "But I *do* believe that she is responsible for the totem pole's disappearance. And Red having disappeared, too, she's scared to death now that she'll get into trouble."

Our attention then drawn to the outer room by the sound of voices, I experienced added surprise when a tall, rather handsome and gaudily dressed woman of middle age swept into the room, bringing with her the smell of ten-cent-store face powder and cheap perfume.

"Your office boy asked me for my calling card," she referred to Rory, who now appeared behind her with a kind of wild look in his eyes. "But instead of giving him a card," the speaker tittered, looking at us archly, "I kissed him."

And I believed it, too! For Rory, poor kid, showed it.

Then to the added amazement of both myself and my chums the visitor dropped into a chair and started weeping.

"Boo-hoo-hoo-hoo!" she sobbed, dabbing at her eyes with a lace handkerchief. "It is breaking my heart—my poor, lonely, tortured heart. For though he deceived me, I—I miss him sorely."

I looked at Scoop and he looked at me, each of us wondering in our own way, I guess, if, by some miracle of transportation, the printer's sister had arrived on the scene two days ahead of time.

For certainly if queerness was a mark of kinship she completely filled the bill!

But we were wrong about the visitor's identity. It wasn't Mrs. Darbin. Nor had the flood of tears been occasioned by any thought of old Cassibaum. The object of the visitor's grief was the supposedly dead-and-buried jeweler.

Yes, you guessed it! It was Mrs. Bella Wise herself. And after kissing each of us in turn (which made a double-header for poor Rory!) she told us, as we stared at her blankly, that we simply must *not* call her Mrs. Wise. That was entirely too formal. She had come to stay, she said, wanting to be near "poor Kasper's final resting place." And we were to call her Cousin Bella.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ELOPEMENT

Cousin Bella, I guess, thought that we were a bunch of stupid jackasses. For all we could do was to stand there and stare at her as she separated herself from her showy headgear, the most noticeable ornament of which was a huge yellow sunflower.

"I always did loathe hotels and lodging houses," she told us. "So you can imagine how quickly I grasped the opportunity to come here and help you when I learned of your present printing difficulties from the depot agent, who also informed me that I'd find convenient living quarters here."

I finally recovered my voice.

"But it isn't our place," I cried, anxious to get rid of her, as I thought of the probable consequences of her appearance on the scene. "We haven't any right to let you stay here."

"Silly!" she tried to stare me down. "Of course, I'm going to stay here. For I was told at the depot that Mr. Kepp lived here. So why shouldn't *I*?"

"But what if he came home unexpectedly

and found you parked in his room?" I tried to scare her out.

I was given another simpering glance.

"Now, that *would* be an embarrassing situation, wouldn't it?" she tittered. "I dare say, though," she injected a grim note into her voice, "that he'd get out of the room faster than he came in if I took after him."

I gave up.

"But what did you mean when you spoke about helping us?" Scoop stepped into the conversation. "Are you a printer?"

"Why, of course," she beamed. "I thought that was understood."

A printer! This certainly didn't match up with the stories that we had heard about her.

"Old Kasper told us that you worked him," I blurted out.

Which started her to weeping again.

"Boo-hoo-hoo-hoo!" she bellowed, her shoulders heaving up and down. "He wasn't justified in talking about me that way. For I've always been a good girl. Nor was I in any way responsible for the loss of those gems that led to our estrangement, though, had I known that he was lying at death's door, I would have forgiven all. But now it's too late. And to think that I didn't even get here in time for the funeral! But I have that beautiful obituary to console me. And how grateful I am that you sent it to me you can't imagine. 'Gone but not

forgotten!' Yes, Kasper," she raised her streaming eyes to the dirty ceiling, acting as though she could see the jeweler sitting up there thrumming a harp, "you are gone. But, dear heart, you are not forgotten. I shall always cherish you in my memory, forgiving and forgetting the wicked stories that you told about me."

Suffering cats! She was getting worse every minute. And to think that we might have to put up with this all day long! It was a sickening thought. And I wondered again, kind of desperate-like, if there wasn't some way of getting rid of her.

"My life has been a checkerboard of shadows and sunshine," she went on, dabbing at her eyes. "Death overtook my first husband in a cistern—he was repairing it during a thunderstorm and I—I accidentally turned the spout the wrong way. My second husband was driving spikes in a railroad tie when the fast express surprised him. My third one fell out of a balloon. Then Kasper came into my life. I was happy again as I pictured a little country home with morning glories romping around the back door. I even bought a package of seed. But instead of flowers, kissed by the morning dew, all I have is a broken heart and shattered dreams."

Holy cow! If this kept up, I told myself,

thinking of old Cassibaum, I'd be in fit condition to go to the cuckoo house myself. Cisterns and railroad spikes and balloons and morning glories! Of all the crazy junk!

Scoop, though, seemed to like it.

"Let me have your hat," said he, reaching for the showy headpiece, "and I'll hang it up in Mr. Kepp's bedroom."

"My boudoir," she simpered, dishing out a look that sent Rory scuttling to the top of the bookcase, where he crouched like a hunted monkey.

"Sure thing," agreed Scoop. "But maybe you'll want to go in there with a pick and shovel when you see the place. For Mr. Kepp wasn't overly neat."

"Oh-h-h-h!" she cooed, peeking into the adjoining room, from the chandelier of which dangled a ragged suit of underwear. "How perfectly ducky it'll be when I get it fixed up. And is that Mr. Kepp's picture on the opposite wall?"

"No," Scoop spoke gravely, "that's Abraham Lincoln."

"How stupid of me! And now, if you don't mind, I'll change my dress, having brought another one in this bag. For if I'm going to help you in the print shop—and I'm simply dying to do my bit, to thus repay you for that *beautiful* obituary—I must dress accordingly, hop-

ing, too, that I'll be able to drown my own bitter sorrows in work. . . . Have you started your next issue?"

Scoop was grinning from ear to ear.

"Ask Jerry," he pointed to me. "For he's the Editor-in-Chief."

Yes, and as Editor-in-Chief I told her then, as businesslike as I knew how, that I had all the help I needed, still hopeful of getting rid of her. Which made her angry. And driving me to the top of the bookcase beside Rory she told me if I didn't dry up, and quit hinting around that she wasn't wanted here, she'd put a button on the end of my nose and pin it to the back of my neck.

"Let it be understood once and for all," she spoke stiffly from the doorway, "that I'm here to stay."

After which she flipped herself out of sight.

Scoop and Peg gave me the hee-haw.

"You're a swell editor," the leader ridiculed. "Don't you realize that printers are temperamental. That's no way to talk to your help. You want to be nice and smooth."

"Yah," I fired back at him, as I dropped from my perch, "and I'd like to take a crack at that nice smooth nose of yours, too. For I might have gotten rid of her if you hadn't butted in. 'Please let me have your sunflower rack,' I mimicked, 'and I'll hang it up with the bedbugs in Abraham Lincoln's closet.'

Gr-r-r-r!" I skinned my teeth at him in conclusion.

And that's just the way I felt, too.

"But why should we want to get rid of her?" he argued pleasantly. "I think she's interesting. And what a loving disposition! Besides, as long as we keep her busy she'll be less likely to find out the truth about that beautiful obituary of yours. Did you know, Jerry," his eyes danced, "that you were so clever?"

I sank into my desk chair.

"Please," I looked up at him with begging eyes. "Don't say anything about it."

"Her one consolation," breathed Peg, supporting his chin with his right hand.

"Your parents will need consolation," I then pitched into him, "if you don't shut up."

After which I sort of slumped exhausted-like in my chair.

"For two cents," I told them wearily, "I'd resign."

"Oh, no!" Scoop cried hastily. "You mustn't do that, Jerry. For we need you."

"Sure thing," I looked him straight in the eye. "You need someone to take all the blame. That's what *you* want. But I'm getting sick and tired of it. And when I go home this noon I'm going to stay there. Let *her* run things if you're so blamed glad to have her around here."

"Don't tell me, Jerry," Scoop spoke with a

long face, "that you're jealous because you got only one kiss."

"*Jealous?*" I screeched. "Oh, if I ever socked you as hard as I want to you'd land in the middle of the Sahara Desert."

"But I wouldn't want to land there," he said gravely. "For it's too hot."

Peg swung in then.

"Scoop's right, Jerry. Give the old girl a chance. For if anybody happens to ask you that typesetting truck is getting on my nerves. Let her do it if she wants to. And who knows but what she'll turn out to be a godsend."

"Just like the ugly duckling," Scoop put in cheerfully.

And, of course, I gave in to them as usual.

"But how are you going to pay her?" I puzzled.

"Let her take out her salary in subscriptions," laughed the leader.

"Or cats," put in Rory, who had rubbed his kissed face so hard with a handkerchief that the skin was sore.

"Honest, fellows," I told them, "you're crazier than she is."

"She does act queer," admitted Peg. "And that story of hers about the three dead husbands sounds kind of rusty to me. But what of it? If she's simple enough to work for nothing, let her work. That's our good luck."

"All she asks," Scoop laughed again, "is a

chance to be near poor dear Kasper's final resting place."

"Which reminds me," Peg followed up, "that we ought to be looking around for a suitable grave. For sooner or later she'll want to see it. And she might get suspicious if we asked her to wait until we fixed it up."

"Oh, no," I spoke scornful-like, "she wouldn't get suspicious over a little thing like that. And when she finds out that her poor dear Kasper is flitting around the landscape, instead of playing a harp, she'll simply pester us to death with pink ice-cream cones and the like."

"I've been wondering," said Scoop, with a thoughtful nod, "if we couldn't use one of the graves in the cemetery."

"Yah, pick out one that's fifty years old," I swung in again. "She's dumb."

"I bet we can fool her, all right," he declared. "Anyway," he grinned, like the happy-go-lucky kid that he is, "I'm game to take a chance if you are. And if the worse comes to the worst we'll pack up our stuff on a moment's notice and go camping."

"If—" I put in pointedly.

"If what?" he searched my face.

"Bill doesn't get his mitts on us first and shove us into the calaboose."

"You certainly are in a pessimistic mood, Jerry," he looked at me with droll eyes.

"I didn't used to be this way," I told him wearily, "before I got this crazy newspaper job. It's getting the best of me, I guess."

He put his hand on my shoulder and posed sort of dramatic-like.

"Always remember, old buddy," he put an effective tremolo into his voice, "that every cloud has a silver lining."

"What we need," I told him, mindful of the responsibilities of my job, "is a little silver in the cash register."

Left alone in the editorial room I glanced up from my work when a shadow crossed my desk. And there in the doorway, seemingly more stooped and weazened than ever, stood old Caleb Obed, one of the town's confirmed bachelors.

Tired of doing his own cooking, and having inherited considerable money lately, he had decided to advertise for a housekeeper. So, glad to get the business, I helped him prepare the advertisement, for which I charged him sixty cents.

Nor did I suspect the cause of his noticeable uneasiness as he continued to hang around.

"Is there anything else that I can do for you, Mr. Obed?" I inquired politely.

"Um . . . I was jest wonderin'—" he began.

"Yes?" I encouraged.

"About that thar advertisement," he fidgeted.

"LET IT BE UNDERSTOOD ONCE AND FOR ALL THAT I'M HERE TO STAY," SHE SAID.

"Yes," I spoke again.

"Mebbe it would be a good plan to change it," he suggested.

"In what way?" I inquired.

"Wa-al," he further hesitated, as the blood rushed to his face, "I've heard of other men doin' it."

I was curious now.

"Doing what?"

"Advertisin' fur a wife."

A wife! Oh, baby! Here was my chance. I'd get rid of that old buzzard now. For I had the feeling that she'd marry anything that wore pants.

"And why not?" I quickly sided in with the flushed advertiser. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Obed, I think you should have a wife. For what would you do if you got the stomach ache? You certainly couldn't ask a hired housekeeper to rub it for you. That wouldn't be proper. But if you had a wife you'd get it rubbed to perfection."

"That's exactly the way I look at it," he waggled happily. "Only, I kind of hated to tell you outright that I really wanted a wife instead of a housekeeper. Fur I didn't know whether I was actin' silly or not."

"There was a time," I rounded out the attractive pictures, "when you couldn't afford to support a wife. But you've got money now. And whoever heard of a man with money rub-

bing his own aching stomach? Besides, winter is coming. And it will be a big convenience to you to have something to put your cold feet on besides a hot brick."

He eyed me sharply.

"How'd you know," he quizzed, "that I've bin in the custom of usin' a brick?"

"All bachelors use bricks," I spoke learnedly.

Then to my good luck the prospective Mrs. Obed herself breezed into the room to consult the office dictionary, having taken complete charge of the typesetting machine.

"Never mind me," she spoke gayly, shooting a glance at old Caleb that would have melted icicles at the north pole.

"Um . . ." said he, when the vision had disappeared. "Who was that?"

"Our new typesetter," I informed proudly.

"Old maid?" he quizzed.

"No," I shook my head. "She's a widow."

Which left considerable to be explained. But that was all right.

"Um. . . . Kind of good-lookin', hain't she?" he said.

"Beautiful," I breathed.

"Engaged?" he further quizzed.

"No."

"What's her name?"

"Mrs. Bella Wise."

"Nice pert name," he waggled.

"Yes," I did some head shaking of my own, "and she's a nice pert girl, too. And *so* affectionate! I'd hate to lose her," I put on. "But I wouldn't stand in the way of her happiness if you wanted her. For I'd like to see her get a good home."

"Um. . . . Mebbe you better give me back that sixty cents an' I'll have a talk with her."

"Here you are," I cheerfully refunded the money. For what was sixty cents if we could get rid of the old goose? Boy, I chuckled to myself, I sure was some clever little matchmaker. And how lovely if I succeeded. Then old Kasper could return from the grave, so to speak. Cousin Bella herself would have a back yard in which to plant her morning glory seed. Old Caleb would have a foot warmer. And we'd have the printing plant to ourselves.

I kind of had a hunch that Cousin Bella had heard more of our talk than she let on. For she didn't seem to be a bit surprised when I sent her into the office, depending on old Caleb, of course, to do his part. I gave them fifteen minutes. And when I opened the door I found them designing a morning glory trellis.

"Isn't he a dear?" cooed the prospective bride, as old Caleb hurried away, with frisky steps, to buy the necessary marriage license, it having been agreed that they were to elope

that night at nine-thirty. "He reminds me so much of the undertaker who buried my third husband."

"Caleb's a good old scout," I told her. And I meant it, too.

I put in the day writing editorials and news items, several things having happened down the street, including two dog fights and a runaway. Scoop looked at me curiously every time he came into the room. For he could see, all right, that something pleasing had happened to me. Peculiarly, though, he didn't ask me any questions. Nor did I venture any information. For I wasn't going to run the chance of him butting in on my plans and upsetting them.

"Don't forget about our detective work, Jerry," Peg reminded, when we separated at six o'clock, Cousin Bella having hurried down the street to buy her supper.

"I'm going to be busy till after nine-thirty," I told him.

"That's all right," he nodded. "We'll meet here at ten o'clock. Better bring a club, too, and a flashlight."

Wanting to make the elopement as pleasing as possible, I picked a big bunch of flowers after supper. But it was wasted work. For when I arrived at the print shop at seven-thirty I found that the impatient lovers had already skinned out in Caleb's new flivver.

There was a note on my desk.

"Sometime," Cousin Bella had written hurriedly, "I'll want you to show me poor dear Kasper's grave. But not now. For I'm too happy to-night to think of graves."

Scoop and Peg stopped in on their way to the picture show. And while they were counting their money I hurriedly dished out the grand and glorious news to them. Cousin Bella was gone for good, I beamed. She and Caleb Obed had eloped.

Scoop at first acted as though he was struck dumb.

"*Eloped?*" he cried, staring at me. "Do you mean to say they've skinned out to get married?"

"Sure thing," I stepped around, very proud of the results of my matchmaking.

Then a sudden change came over the leader.

"Oh, my gosh!" he roared, laughing until the tears ran down his cheeks. "This is the funniest thing I ever heard of in all my life. And to think, Jerry, that *you* never caught on! That's the funniest part of all. Don't you understand, kid? Cousin Bella wasn't a woman at all. It was old Cassibaum himself, dressed up in one of his female-impersonation outfits."

CHAPTER XVIII

CREEPING SHADOWS

I was told afterwards that I fainted dead away. But at the time it seemed to me as though I merely sat down to rest, Adam and Eve having told me, at the end of my long journey, that they'd show me through the garden of Eden as soon as Eve took in the family washing, which hung at the back door on a grapevine. I could see her piling the nice clean fig leaves on her bare arms. But I didn't watch her very long for my attention was soon drawn to Abraham Lincoln, who told me, as he parked his new red flivver beside the goldfish pool, that he was on his way to the back porch to give the baby morning glories their usual daily climbing lesson.

Then who should heave into the picture but old Kasper Bollan himself, all dolled up in green goggles and a new pair of wings. But I quickly made ear plugs of my fingers, when he broke the strings of his harp. For I didn't like to hear angels talk that way. It seemed that there was a shortage of strings in the garden, some of the grandma angels having started

the fad of braided harp string rugs. So he substituted his own shoe-strings. And while he was playing "Gone but not forgotten," the goldfish joining mournfully in the chorus, a giggling sunflower twiddled up behind me, its leaves rustling like silk petticoats, and implanted a gooey smack on my right ear.

After which all of the other sunflowers in the garden set up a wail to have their aching stomachs rubbed. Please, please, please, they begged. Which brought old Caleb Obed hobbling onto the scene with an armful of hot bricks. But these were dropped in a heap when Eve yipped to the newcomer from her boudoir window to hurry into the house and pump up the new gasoline stove so that she could heat her irons. Adam had a date to elope with a typesetting machine, she said, with her mouthful of hairpins, and he was raising Hail Columbia in the bathroom because his Sunday fig leaf had a wrinkle in it.

I could hear Peg, too. Peculiarly, though, he was nowhere in sight in the garden. And then I heard Scoop.

"He'll be all right in a minute or two," said old hefty.

"The poor kid!" Scoop spoke in a gentle voice. "I never dreamed that he'd keel over."

"Nor me either."

"Did he say anything at all, Peg?"

"No. He just looked at us kind of horrified-like and took a flop."

"Gosh! If he doesn't open his eyes pretty soon I'm going to call a doctor."

"Put that cold rag on his forehead. That's it. And kind of squeeze his hand, Scoop, to let him know we're here. Good old pal! A fellow doesn't realize what chums mean to him till something like this happens. Boy, I can't imagine what life would be like around here without him."

"Look, Peg!" Scoop gave a joyful cry. "He's blinking his eyes. See?"

"Oh, baby! Squeeze tighter, Scoop. I believe that helps."

"Hi, Jerry," the leader suddenly appeared in front of me, his mouth spread from ear to ear.

I looked around with blinking eyes. But I couldn't see anything of Adam and Eve.

"Where did they go to?" I inquired, kind of dizzy-like, wondering, too, what made my forehead so wet.

"Never mind, Jerry," Scoop tried to put my question aside, sort of placating-like. "Just forget about them."

"Old Caleb was there, too," I told him dizzily.

"Of course," he gently stroked my hair. "We know all about that."

"But where were you," I inquired, star-

ing at him, "when the sunflower kissed me on the ear?"

Which brought Peg into sight.

"The poor kid," said he.

"I think we better send for a doctor," Scoop spoke anxiously.

"Just a minute," said Peg. Then he got down in front of me.

"Can you see my eyes, Jerry?"

"Sure thing."

"How many?"

"Two, of course."

"And what's that?" he pointed.

"Your ear."

"Right or left?"

"Left."

"Listen to this: Eenie-meenie-minie-mo. Catch a nigger by the toe. Now," he spoke eagerly, "let's hear you say it."

"Eenie-meenie-minie-mo. Catch a nigger by the toe," I repeated.

Which tickled old hefty as much as though I had recited the whole Declaration of Independence.

"Hurray!" he yipped. "He's all right, Scoop."

And then they grabbed me, acting for all the world as though they had rescued me at the edge of the grave, and hugged the tar out of me.

A change was going on in my mind. And I had a sort of vague recollection now that the

leader had said something that startled me. But what was it? I pressed on my dizzy wits. Oh, yes! Cousin Bella wasn't a woman at all, but old Cassibaum, the female impersonator, dressed up in petticoats. That was it! And I had tried to marry him off to old Caleb Obed! That truck about the garden of Eden was all a crazy dream.

"Did I faint?" I wanly searched my chums' faces.

"I'll tell the world you did," Peg gave a jerky laugh. "And for a moment or two you had us scared stiff. But you're all right now. As for that goofy old printer, forget all about him, Jerry."

"But when old Caleb finds out that he married a man," the situation worried me, "won't the law hold me responsible?"

"Of course, not. Nor will old Caleb say anything about it when he gets home. For he'd be the laughingstock of the town if he did."

There was sense to that, all right.

"I wonder where he is now?" I gave a weak grin. For it *was* funny, after all.

"Probably holding his 'bride's' hand in some minister's parlor," Scoop grinned in turn.

"Poor Caleb!" I laughed. "He'll never forgive me."

The leader grew more serious then.

"I still can't figure out," said he, "what the printer's idea was in putting on the crazy mas-

querade party. It would almost seem that he's completely cuckoo. On the other hand, this may be his idea of a clever joke. But if it *is* a joke (and he pulled a lot of them, I understand, when he was a young man), how far is he going with it? My gosh! He can't carry on the deception forever."

I searched the speaker's face.

"But how did *you* get wise to him?" I inquired, disgusted over my own stupidity. And after all that crazy made-up "cistern" talk, too (for, of course, that story about the three husbands was all bunk), and those brainless simpering gestures! Good grief! I certainly had been asleep at the switch, all right.

"Shucks!" laughed Scoop. "I recognized that yellow wig as soon as he took off his hat. But he had me guessing. And until I found out for sure what his game was I decided to keep mum. So you can see why I was so eager to take him into the family. That would be a good way to keep track of him, I told myself, until his sister arrived. And I wanted to pump him, too, about Red's disappearance. But you upset everything, Jerry, with your matchmaking."

Yah, I gritted my teeth, completely disgusted with myself, I was some matchmaker, all right. Still, as I told him, it wouldn't have happened if he had confided in me.

"How about yourself?" he grinned good-naturedly.

Later we had a hearty laugh at Rory's expense. For when he learned who the kisser was I never saw a sillier-looking kid in all my life.

"Don't tell Ma about it," he begged. "For if she found out why Hi washed both cheeks to-night Hi'd never 'ear the last of it."

As for the trickster himself we were undecided whether to report him at the infirmary, and let Mrs. Darbin go to pot, or wait and corner him when he came home. For certainly, we concluded, the elopers were bound to wind up at their starting point before very many hours had elapsed—granting of course, that Caleb didn't try to put on a Bluebeard head-separation act with the exposed "bride." For the old man had a temper, all right.

On the other hand it wasn't improbable, as we saw, that he'd get the worst of the deal if the "bride" really was cuckoo. Still, he wasn't in any particular danger. And determined now to put the elopers out of our minds for the present, having other work to do, we first checked up on our weapons, and then, having locked the print-shop door behind us, we started down the street in the direction of the jewelry store.

The main streets were full of life, with people crowding the sidewalks in front of the theaters and automobiles spinning up and down the

lighted thoroughfares. Yet, we seemed peculiarly alone as we turned into the jewelry-store alley at the far end of which a lively battle was in progress between two rival tomcats. There was something mournful about their rasping yowls. It made me think of squabbling ghosts. Somber, too, was the still canal, as we caught glimpses of it on our right. The water looked like ink.

It was particularly dark and spooky behind the jewelry store. And how forbidding were those barred windows! They gave me the creeps. I found myself wondering, too, as my uneasiness increased, how far my voice would carry if I had occasion to yell for help. Would the people in front of the closed jewelry store hear me? I hoped so.

For I couldn't get away from the feeling that we were heading into something weird and hazardous.

Fearful of hidden eyes we got down on our hands and knees, Peg leading, as usual, and Rory bringing up the rear. Thus we crept along by inches. We were now as close to the back door as we dared to go. So we flattened ourselves in the shadows, two on each side of the low doorstep.

"I don't know what we're up against," said Peg, when the necessary signals had been arranged. "But if you find yourselves in a pinch, fellows, grab your club and sock for dear life.

Don't let the other guy get the best of you."

"No danger of anybody getting the best of me," came courageously from Rory, who had a club as big as a baseball bat.

Scoop stirred uneasily as he lay within arm's reach of me.

"Hear anything inside?" he whispered, referring to the darkened building.

"No," I whispered back.

"I can't imagine that old Kasper's in there."

"Someone was in there night before last," I maintained. "For Bill Hadley said so."

"I wonder if I could see anything if I peeked in the window."

"Try it," I urged.

"Hey, Peg," Scoop raised his voice.

"Well?"

"I'm going to peek in the window. So don't sock me by mistake."

I was glad when he returned.

"See anything?" I inquired eagerly.

"No. Either the curtain is pulled clear down or there's something pinned over the window."

A house of mystery! That's what it was all right, I told myself, as I lay there in the creeping shadows, the events of the past few days sort of parading through my mind. There was the jeweler himself, a man of mystery for years back, if the stories about him were true. His store would be closed for days at a time, yet, as mentioned, his closest neighbors seldom saw

him leave or return. And always when he was at home there in front of his store stood that queer wooden sentinel, as mysterious as its owner, and now peculiarly mutilated. Mixed up in the mystery, too, as it seemed to center within these locked doors and barred windows, was an unknown prowler, whose peculiar disguise had earned for him the name of Green Goggles. We suspected that he was a gem thief. Which, however, was pure theory. We had no proof that he had robbed the jewelry store, or would enter or leave it to-night. But it was our big ambition, as Juvenile Jupiter Detectives, to trap him if he did appear on the scene, anxious to learn his story, as it embraced a peculiar interest in eggs. Nor was it improbable that the mysterious jeweler himself would walk into our trap.

Rory was ready to quit at eleven-thirty. But we hushed him up. And then, shortly after midnight, the whole neighborhood having wrapped itself in silence, a mysterious figure appeared in the alley, plainly headed in our direction.

"Here he comes," breathed Peg.

And did my little old heart ever pound! Oh, baby!

Closer and closer came the noticeably cautious prowler. He was within a few feet of us now. And for an instant or two, as he tiptoed up the steps to the back door, his goggles glow-

ing like cats' eyes in the darkness, I was scared stiff that he'd spot us. But the colored lenses of his goggles saved us. For we could see him plainer than he could see us. Yet, how small he was! It amazed me.

The door knob rattled. Then we heard the click of a key in the lock—or was the prowler trying several keys? Then, as he started down the steps, seemingly having been defeated in his attempt to unlock the door, we closed in on him, Peg having given the proper signal.

"Hands up!" bellowed old hefty, as we rushed forward with raised clubs. "If you don't we'll knock you cuckoo."

"Oh, put down those clubs and shut up," said a familiar voice. "What I want instead of a bump on the bean is a key to open that blamed door. For I'm half starved. And I heard old Kasper say himself that he's got enough grub in his pantry to last a man six months."

"Red!" I gasped, staring at the speaker, hardly able to believe my own ears, Scoop and Peg, as dumfounded as I was, crowding at my elbows. "Is it really you?"

"How disappointing!" was his silly reply. "I was in hopes that you'd mistake me for the queen of Sheba."

CHAPTER XIX

RED'S AMAZING STORY

I CAN stand a joke. But this latest trick of Red's got my goat. And I longed to take him down and pound the daylights out of him. The little snip! He thought he had done something clever. And *me* shivering in my shoes. That was the part that made me the hottest. As though I would have to yell for help to handle a spineless little brat like *him*. Gr-r-r-r! It was all I could do, as he stood there grinning at us in that brainless way of his, to keep my hands off him.

And what *I* told him! It's a wonder his ears didn't get scorched.

"Just a minute," Peg cut me off, sort of coming out of a trance. "Let's get the straight of this." Then he turned to the cocky trickster. "Are you the guy who dropped the rotten eggs in Clark's Hall?"

"Rotten eggs?" stared Red. "What do you mean?"

"I thought so," Peg gave a quick nod, his eyes snapping excitedly. "Don't you see,

Jerry?" he turned to me. "There *is* a Green Goggles, after all."

"I'll tell the world there is," Red piped up. "And will he ever rave when he awakens and finds his goggles missing."

"Then you know who he is?" Scoop cried excitedly.

Which, of course, gave freckle face a fine chance to show off.

"Look me over," he strutted around. "I know everything."

I didn't feel quite so harsh toward him now.

"How about the totem pole, Red?" I inquired eagerly. "What became of it?"

"Oh, I had the men shove it under the barn."

"Whose barn?" I stared.

"Ours, of course."

Peg and I traded glances.

"Where did we ever get the idea," laughed old hefty, though kind of jerky-like, "that we knew anything about the detective business?"

"I knew you'd look for the pole," said Red. "So I put it in an easy place to fool you."

"You're clever, all right," I told him. But the way I said it was no compliment.

"But why did you hide it in the first place?" quizzed Scoop.

"To save it."

And then when he told us what he meant, and who the men were who had helped him get the pole out of sight, we were literally struck dumb.

But I won't tell you about that here. For it'll be better, I think, to bring that into my concluding chapter.

At Scoop's suggestion we then went over to the print shop, where Red dished out his whole amazing story.

"I was scared stiff after you left," he admitted, referring to the night of his disappearance. "For you can't imagine, fellows, how blamed lonesome it was up there. Br-r-r! But I gritted my teeth, determined to stick it out. If it would help the newspaper, I told myself, I'd do it, and there was no maybe or I-guess-so about it. It simply *had* to be done. Besides, I didn't want to be laughed at. You know how that is."

"Good old Red," Scoop spoke feelingly.

"But Fate, or whatever you call it, was against me. For that pop that I drank made me as sick as a horse."

"Why not a jackass?" I put in pointedly.

He stiffened.

"This is my story," he scowled. "And if you want to talk about your relatives wait till I get through."

Wough! That was a hot one, all right.

Peg was grinning.

"Maybe you drank too much," was his suggestion.

"Don't be silly. All I had to start with was twenty-four bottles. There was something

wrong with the blamed truck, I tell you. And thinking that I was going to die—I never was so sick in all my life, fellows—I came down. Then on my way to Doc Leland's office I bumped into those men that I told you about. And, bu-lieve me, they *would* have taken the pole, too, if I hadn't talked them out of it. But when they asked me to go back to Chicago with them I balked. Still, what *could* I do? The pole was gone. And unless I told the people the truth about its disappearance, they'd think I had hidden it to jump my job. Then I got a *big* idea. A *wonderful* idea. I'd put on a vanishing act myself. See? I wouldn't let anybody—not even you guys—know where I was. And then, at the proper time, when the whole country was worked up over my disappearance, with rewards totaling millions of dollars being offered for information leading to my whereabouts, and so on and so forth, I'd fix it so the *Tutter Bugle,* the dear little newspaper with a big snoot—I mean a big toot—could solve the mystery. Pretty hot, huh? But where could I hide? I thought of our attic, but decided against it. For it's blamed hot up there in the summer time. Besides, you know how snoopy Aunt Pansy is. Then I thought of the Hidden House. Hot dog! It would be fun to hide there. So I got my raincoat and skinned out at once."

Which cleared up *that* point. But we still didn't know what he meant by the "Hidden House." Certainly, I concluded, he couldn't mean the log cabin that entered so prominently into my *Tittering Totem* story.

"It's that old house on Clark Street—the one with the bushes all around it," he then explained. "Hidden House is a good name for it, all right. And what a big joke, I told myself, as I pried open a kitchen window, to hide right here in town, within six blocks of my own home, while the police all over the country were searching for me. I had a flashlight. And while I was looking around for a place to sleep, thinking of the fun I'd have the following day making a bed of leaves, and truck like that, just like the babes in the wood, I noticed that there were a lot of footprints on the dusty floor. That was queer. For the place had been closed for years. And then—get ready for a shock, fellows—I heard a groan."

"How you must have jumped!" old hefty's eyes danced.

"Oh, I don't know," was the cocky reply.

"But what was it?" pressed Scoop. "A sick rat?"

"Rat, your granny. It was old Kasper Bollan himself."

The leader was staring now.

"Old *Kasper?*" he repeated.

"Absolutely and nothing else but. He was down in the cellar. See? And he was tied hand and foot."

"Boy!" exclaimed Peg. "This is getting dramatic."

"I never heard of anybody tying his own hands and feet," continued the story-teller. "So I decided——"

"In the usual clever way," I prompted.

"Yah," he grinned, "I decided in my usual clever way to lay low and watch, the jeweler, of course, never suspecting that I had spotted him through a knothole in the floor."

"But didn't he hear you?" Scoop eyed the story-teller sharply.

"Of course, he heard me. But he thought I was the other geezer."

"Yes?" the leader encouraged.

"Hearing someone at the back door, I jumped into a closet at the head of the cellar stairs. I could see through a crack. And pretty soon, the back door having opened and closed, I got a look at him. Sweet Paris green! Here, says I to myself, as a spider came tripping down the inside of the closet door and collided with my nose, is that geezer that old Kasper told us about, meaning, of course, the guy with the green goggles. Evidently, says I, there's a regular house party going on here, which kind of upset my plans of making over the main ball-

room to suit my own ideas. But life has its disappointments," he sighed.

"Isn't that a fact?" sympathized Scoop, with a similar sigh.

"And what happened then?" put in Peg. "Did you take an ax and cut your initials in the back of the newcomer's head?"

"You ought to realize," the speaker stiffened, "That *my* methods are more subtle."

Which, I remembered, was a pet expression of his Aunt Pansy's.

"I guess I better shut up," said Peg, looking kind of dizzy.

"Well, as I was saying," the story went on, "I stuck around for two or three days, living on the crumbs, so to speak, and Green Goggles blaming his loss of food on the rats, getting thinner and thinner——"

"Who?" grinned Scoop. "You or the rats?"

"Me, of course."

"You don't show it," I looked at his face.

"Where do you think my stomach is?" he shot back at me. "In the front of my head?"

"There's something there," I gave him a dig, "that looks like the interior of Mammoth Cave. But I never knew for sure what it was."

"Oh, shut up," Peg scowled at me. "Let's hear the story."

"Just a minute," Scoop raised his hand. "I want to ask a question."

"Shoot," said Red.

"Did you saw off the Indian's arm?"

"Sure thing. I would have hidden the whole Indian if I could. But the blamed thing was too heavy for me. And suspecting, from something that old Kasper said to himself about the Indian's raised hand, that the rubies were hidden there, I took that way of saving them. For I don't know yet whether the jeweler stole the gems, as Green Goggles says, or whether the latter, in turn, is trying to get away with them."

I could fill another twenty pages with Red's rambling gab. But to save time and space I'll pick up the story here in my own words.

Certain valuable rubies had come up missing in Chicago, the search for them finally leading to the jewelry store on Grant Street. Which explains why old Kasper (it was found out afterwards that he was a bad egg) was so excited that morning when he had surprised Green Goggles peeping in his window. For he knew, all right, who the goggle wearer was! And even before we got there he had made up his mind to skin out. Then he was captured by the very man from whom he was trying to escape, Red getting the whole story as he listened through knotholes and door cracks.

So you can see who advertised for the missing Indian. It was Green Goggles himself. By consistent questioning he had found out from

his prisoner that the missing gems had been hidden in a secret pocket in one of the Indian's hands. But before he could locate the Indian (he put an advertisement in both Tutter newspapers), Red saved the day, the severed arm, we were told, having been buried under the gooseberry bushes in the freckled one's back yard.

"Then it was Green Goggles who was in the jewelry store night before last?" Scoop inquired, at the story's conclusion.

"Sure thing," Red nodded.

"Did he rob the store?"

"I don't think so. He didn't say anything about it."

"But what was he doing in Clark's Hall?" the leader persisted. "You haven't explained that."

"He was looking for the missing rubies."

"But he seemed particularly interested in eggs."

"Sure thing. The magician, you know, is a crook. See? Goes around the country stealing gems. Green Goggles knew about it. In fact *that* bird knows everything. And hiding gems in eggs, as I understand it, is an old trick with smugglers and thieves, though how the hole is patched up is more than I can figure out."

"And you say he's a thief himself?"

"He certainly acts like it."

"But how did you get his goggles and keys?"

"Oh, I put on a neat little pickpocket act to-night while he was asleep, having made up my mind to find food, by hook or crook, or die in the attempt. For honest, fellows, I'm hungrier than a sparrow at a Scotch picnic. And what fun, was my added thought, to adopt his disguise."

"You're lucky," grunted Peg, "that you didn't get the top of your bean caved in."

The clock on College Hill then donged in the distance.

"Twelve-thirty," said Peg, thinking, I guess, of what was liable to happen to him when he got home.

" 'Ow do you know it's twelve-thirty?" said Rory. "Maybe it's one o'clock or even one-thirty."

"According to my watch," a voice spoke pleasantly through the open window, "it's the even hour."

Then, as we stood there, sort of rooted to the spot, our eyes sticking out like fat radishes, the speaker sprang nimbly into the room.

"You're a bright boy," he patted Red on the head. "You did a nice job of picking my pockets to-night. But you overlooked one very important thing, sonny: You should have given me a sleeping powder."

CHAPTER XX

CONCLUDING SURPRISES

When I tell you that the supposed thief was really a detective (and a mighty clever one, too, notwithstanding his peculiar disguise), you can see how near I am to the end of my story.

And was it ever a relief to us when he told us the truth about himself! Sweet Paris green! Even Peg was as white as a sheet.

Later we dug up the wooden arm in Red's back yard. At two o'clock in the morning, mind you, with the eerie darkness crowding in on us with icicle-like fingers and Red breathing hard against the back of my neck. Had the arm been actual flesh and blood I don't think I could have been more shivery-like. As for the recovered rubies themselves, all I could think of when the happy detective poured them into his hand (the secret pocket was in the upraised bunch of cigars) were frozen drops of blood.

To-day old Kasper is very properly serving a term in the penitentiary. And considering the extent of his crookedness the wonder is to me that he escaped arrest as long as he did. I guess, though, that he was one of the slickest

thieves the police and detective forces ever had to contend with.

Had he behaved himself, and led an honest life, he could have become a power in the gem world. For he knew gems of all kinds from "A" to "Z." But his greed got the best of him. He coveted the gems that he was called upon to appraise. And having the mind of a fox he very often realized his unworthy desires. I can imagine how he gloated in secret over his stolen wealth. For gems were his god. But he lost everything in the end, even his freedom. Following his brief trial a distant relative appeared on the scene and quietly closed up his business. Nor did Mrs. Wise shed any tears when he was taken away to prison. I guess, though, that she did do considerable weeping when the police made her give up the gems that she had lifted from her smitten suitor—big boob that he was to let himself get mixed up with her in the first place. I never saw her. But I've often wondered if she looks anything like the other "Mrs. Wise" who descended on us so tearfully. Gosh! I sure was dumb, all right, to let old Cassibaum pull that "female-impersonation" trick on me. And how he laughed about it afterwards!

Do you remember the night his sister called up on long distance? Well, he overheard everything that was said, for having separated from the other escaped inmates (who were picked up

near Joliet) he was hiding in his own bedroom. Scoop had joked about dressing him up in women's clothes and making use of him. Remember? Well, that's where the old man got the idea. Gathering together the necessary clothing and other truck (including plenty of cold cream and face powder!) he skinned out, later putting in an appearance under circumstances already described.

As for old Caleb, he got just as much fun out of the crazy "elopement" as the masquerader himself.

"Yep," the "groom" admitted to his amused cronies, when he got out of the hospital, he and the "bride" having kissed a telephone pole on the way home from Ashton, "I was fooled at first. Thought I really was makin' eyes at a swell-lookin' widdy. Um. . . . But ol' Cassy tol' me who he was when me an' him was left alone in the editorial room. I warn't to tell the b'ys, though. Nope. We'd let on, he said, always fond of a joke you know, that we was goin' to elope. It would be fun. So he wrote that silly note to the Todd boy—yep, it was Jerry who tried to git me married off—an' gittin' an early start we drove over to Ashton to see a movie. Then, as you know, we got tangled up with that pesky telyphone pole on the way home. *Me?* No, I didn't git bumped on the head. That was Cassy. I hear now, though, that the bump put his wheels back in

place. Yep, he *was* kind of dippy. We all know that. But he's as bright as a new dollar now."

So far as I know to the contrary old Caleb is still looking for a "foot-warmer." And when I tell you that the printer has gone into vaudeville, the "elopment" having given him an idea for a clever "female-impersonation" act, you can readily imagine how happy he is. The big dream of his life has been realized. His newspaper days are over forever. Earlier I had been turned against him, thinking he was a miser. But when his mind cleared up I found out that he was a fine old gentleman.

"I never knew he was so poor," his sister told the neighbors, when she arrived on the scene in a big blue sedan. "For his letters contained no hint of the true situation here. And how I regret now that I didn't keep in closer touch with him! His happiness means a great deal to me, for he's one of my nearest living relatives. So, if he wants to go on the stage, I'll do all I can to help him. I'm hoping, though, that he'll soon give up this new notion of his and make his home with me."

I saw a great deal of her during the week that the banged-up "bride" was in the hospital. And one night she invited Scoop and I to have supper with her at the Commercial Hotel, asking us, at the close of the swell meal, as she

sort of beamed at us across the table, how we'd like to own a new motor boat.

"But why should you buy us a new motor boat?" Scoop searched her face.

"Because of the splendid effort you made to save my brother's sinking newspaper."

"Shucks!" laughed Scoop, looking at me. "That was fun."

And I knew what he was thinking about, too!

Mrs. Darbin then spoke of the long-distance call.

"I was terribly upset that night. And I can see now how silly it was of me to ask you to find my brother and hide him for me. But had you done that, as requested, I would have kept my word."

"Boy Scouts," Scoop spoke earnestly, "don't expect pay for doing a good turn—though, if I must tell you the truth," he added, with an uneasy laugh, "I'm glad that things worked out as they did. For if we *had* hidden him, as suggested, we might have gotten into trouble with the infirmary people."

The woman leaned forward.

"And you realized that when you gave me your promise?"

"Yes, ma'am," Scoop admitted, kind of faltering-like.

"Then let us argue no further about the suggested motor boat. I'll order it to-morrow."

Which she did. Though what we did with the boat when it arrived, swell little craft that it was, can better be told in another story.

The printer and his sister having left town, the newspaper plant is now for sale. And occasionally Dad jokes me about it, asking me if I would like to have him buy it for me. As though I *would* care to get mixed up in another mess like that! No, thanks! I've had my fill of editing. For a more safe occupation I'd prefer bullfighting or rattlesnake capturing.

I was several weeks regaining the friendship of Mr. Wheeler and our other upset "advertisers." As for Mrs. Gregory, I'd rather walk a mile than face her. Gosh! But she, too, has forgiven me. Nor does Bill Hadley act half as grouchy as he used to. So I guess I'll come out all right.

Having been told about the missing twenty-dollar bills, Green Goggles (as I'll continue to call him) put out a police net for old Sitting Bull. But to no success. And where the pole-sitter is to-day nobody in our town knows—or cares.

As for the wooden Indian, Red still has it, having nailed the loose arm back in place. He talks of building a pollywog fountain in the back yard, the idea having fastened itself in his head that old Rain-in-the-face would look swell with a stream of water squirting through the end of his nose. Well, we'll wait and see what

happens. For Red has had other ideas that never developed. At present he's charging the neighborhood kids three cents apiece to look at the wooden Indian. And you should hear his lecture! It goes something like this (accompanied, of course, by a lot of big gestures):

"Yes, ladies and gents, this is the famous wooden Indian in which the sentenced jeweler hid the million-dollar rubies. See? Here is the secret pocket. He made it himself. Realizing that he was liable to get caught any day, he fixed up this hiding place for his booty, figuring that no one would ever look for stolen gems in a place like that. The morning he gave the Indian to me he had seen Green Goggles hanging around. So the rubies were quickly put away in the hiding place prepared for them, it being the jeweler's idea, of course, to secretly recover them later on. But instead of making good his escape he was captured. I saw the detective and his prisoner in the Hidden House on Clark Street. And it was there that I overheard old Kasper say things about the Indian that put me wise. I saw now why he had kept the Indian in his store. I saw, too, where the rubies were hidden. They were in the upraised wooden hand. So I sawed it off and hid it."

The hero!

He's mighty careful, though, to put a muffler on his big talk when he's around us. For we know the truth about his adventure in the Hid-

den House. He thought he was fooling the detective. But I've already told you how the detective fooled him, allowing him free run of the house and later shadowing him so effectually. For the detective, of course, knew that the freckled one was there all the time. Clever stuff, if you were to ask me. Still, as I say, those peculiar goggles will always be a mystery to me. I can't figure out why the detective adopted such a noticeable disguise. Was it to frighten old Kasper away? Maybe. Nor have I been able to figure out why he took his prisoner to the cellar of the Hidden House instead of to jail. I have a lot of things to learn about the detective business, I guess.

As for the magician, he passed out of my story when he left town with his loaded truck. Nor did Red get switched—if that is of any interest to you. And the scare I had in his house that rainy night was all imagination.

And now in conclusion I'll tell you who helped Red hide the totem pole—my concluding surprise, as you might say.

Mrs. Pangborn had a cousin in the moving business, who laughingly suggested to her, when he heard about her new activities, that he'd gladly get rid of the totem pole for her if she said the word. He and his men were planning to pass through Tutter at night with one of his big moving vans, he said, and could

easily pick up the totem pole and put it away where no one would ever find it.

Then the pole disappeared! On the very night, too, that the furniture mover, a daring, reckless fellow, had planned to pass through town. But what disturbed the newspaper woman more than the disappearance of the pole itself was the similar disappearance of its occupant. Had the pole-sitter been abducted? It would seem so. And unable to get in touch with her relative she attempted to pump us.

No wonder she was worried!

Hearing our story, Dad said it wouldn't be right to expose her openly. So he and Mr. Ellery talked the matter over with her distressed husband in private. Poor Mr. Jiggs! What later passed between the editor and his tricky wife will never be known. Mrs. Pangborn later admitted to her clique that she had been unfair in her attitude toward the Boy Scouts. So the totem pole, as later recovered from its hiding place, is going up after all. For once the leader gave in the other Tutter women were willing enough to follow suit. I have a hunch, too, that art crusading isn't going to be so popular in our town hereafter. For many of the women (Mother included) are tiring of it. And considerable hope has been expressed on all sides that the old editor, to whom California isn't the enchanting paradise

that he had expected, will come back. I hope he does. For while I have nothing against Mr. Jiggs himself, I certainly have no respect for his wife.

And now let me say a word or two about the next book of this series. When the new motor boat arrived the first thing we did, of course, was to scoot up the canal to Oak Island. And did that peachy little island, with its caves, rocky bluffs, hidden ravines and cat-tail marshes, ever look good to us!

The spring was still there. And what happy memories it revived as I stood beside it! It sure was good to be back, I told myself, as I looked around at the familiar trees and gullies. A boy's paradise! That's what it was, all right.

And then were we ever thunderstruck when we came within sight of Bible Cave! Gee-miny crickets! For strange things had been happening there, all right.

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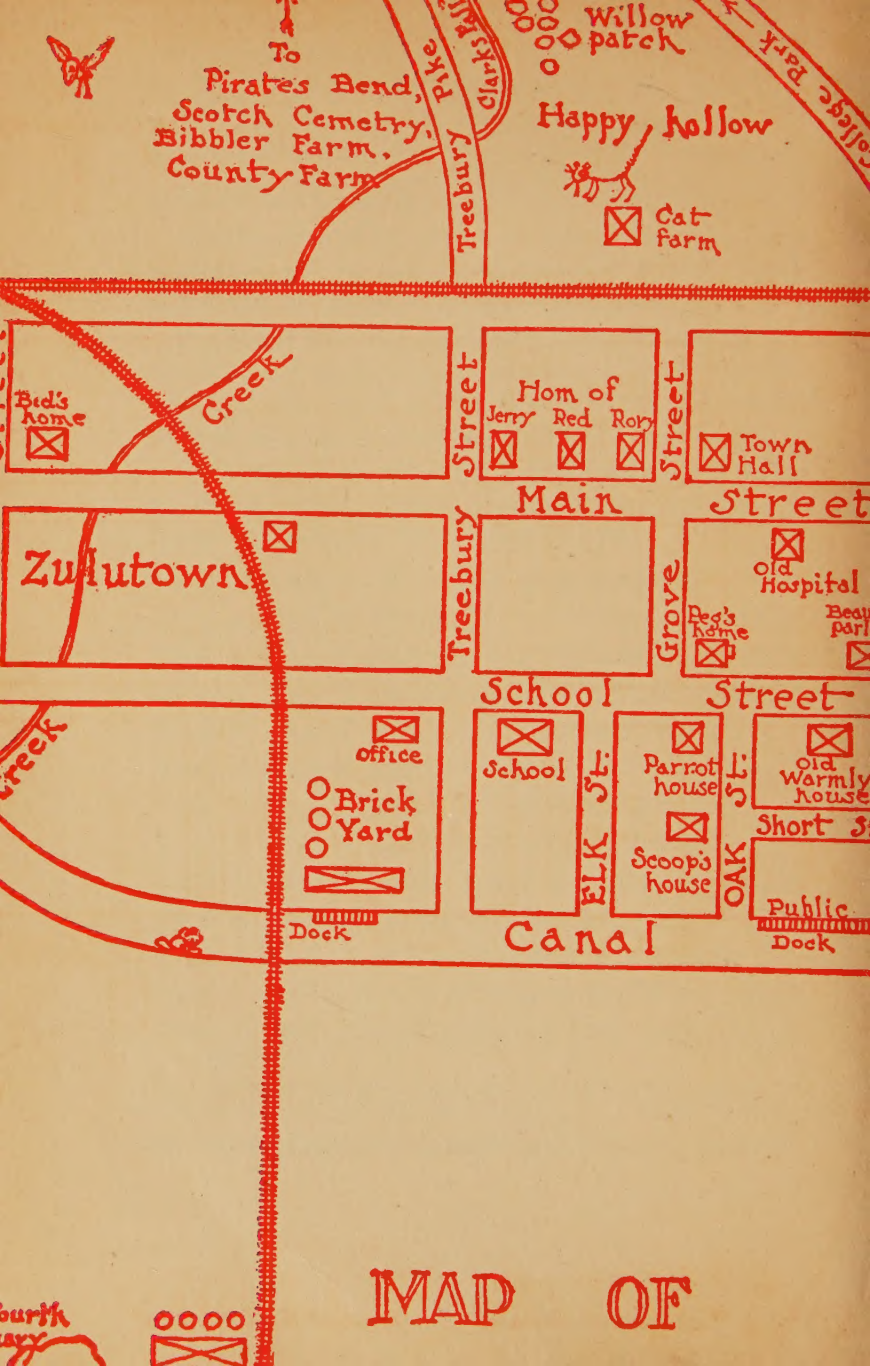
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Jerry Red Rory
Street
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Grove
Old Hospital
Peg's home
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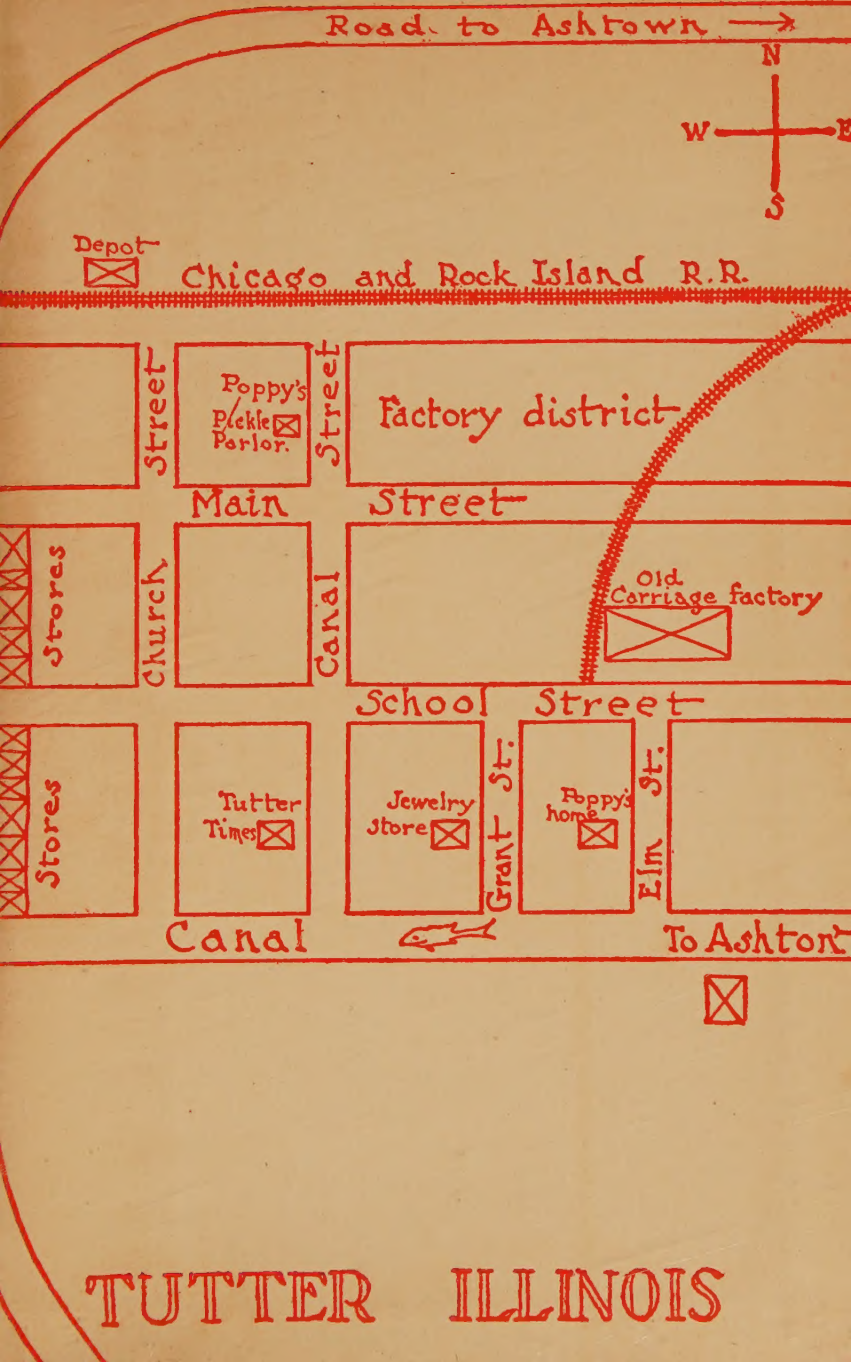
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Depot
Chicago and Rock Island R.R.
Street
Poppy's Pickle Parlor
Street
Factory district
Main Street
Stores
Church
Canal
Old Carriage factory
School Street
Stores
Tutter Times
Jewelry Store
Grant St.
Poppy's home
Elm St.
Canal
To Ashton
TUTTER ILLINOIS